What is the Role and Value of Extra-Mural Medical Activity?

Abstract:

Presently all Irish doctors, apart from trainees, are in the process of getting their extra-mural medical activities. They help to keep us up to date. They prevent the individual, group of doctors, or the hospital from adopting an insular, inward policy. Many organizations develop blind spots over time. Outside opinions and influences are necessary to prevent this from happening.

The electronic age offers alternatives. Data can be communicated instantly around the world. A geographically dispersed group of experts can be linked together to discuss pressing issues. Videoconferences have been proposed for some time but haven't taken off. They haven't been popular because there have been technical problems. In the 1990s it had been expected that internet technology would bring rapid changes but it hasn't happened. Until recently the costs of the hardware was prohibitive for most organizations but this is now changing rapidly.

Another reservation is that most of us can recall instances when the technology failed to operate effectively. Other criticisms include the lack of eye contact and the pressure of time constraints. In the process a proportion of the large and important audience is lost. The electronic age offers alternatives. Video and internet-mediated conferences offer the doctor the alternatives of accessing the proceedings at a more suitable time, and the flexibility of staying within his own practice. Suitable facilities are required and local hubs develop. This will afford the doctor an opportunity to discuss the proceedings with local colleagues. To begin with more international conferences should start providing simultaneous internet transmissions of the important plenary sessions. There is an opportunity to undertake studies comparing the information gained and knowledge obtained by doctors and 'virtual' delegates.

Many commentators agree that it is time for change. Unless a new approach is adopted large international conferences may become a dinosaur due to their high costs and the pressure of time constraints. In the future they will be partly replaced by electronic communication systems. It will never replace face to face interaction and networking. There is room for both. The challenge is to preserve and develop the important new research. There are the benefits of personal contact and professional networking.