

CROSS-INDUSTRY Organizations

Origins of the Drug Delivery to the Lungs Conferences

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On behalf of The Aerosol Society



The Drug Delivery to the Lungs (DDL) Conference series should be very familiar to the readership of *Inhalation*, having celebrated its 25th meeting in December last year. It provides a highly successful forum for networking and the exchange of knowledge, attracting more than 500 delegates, and is a regular event on the calendars of many of its attendees. There were even a few people (including myself) who were also attendees at the very first DDL conference, back in 1989. While the aims of the conference have been described, most recently in the August 2014 issue of *Inhalation*, the evolution of this event has not previously been captured.

Formation of The Aerosol Society

The DDL Conference is run under the auspices of The Aerosol Society. A Standing Committee composed of Patricia (Pat) Burnell, Alan Cussens, David (Dai) Griffiths, Jolyon Mitchell, John Pritchard and Nick Vaughan was formed in 1985 to bring this Society into being. Through purely voluntary efforts, they planned and ran the inaugural meeting, which attracted 135 delegates to the Royal Free Hospital in London, UK in 1986. The Standing Committee became a formal Committee of the Society with addition of three new members and election of a Chairman, Treasurer and General Secretary. In those days, the Society did not have a large reserve of funds. So when in 1988 Pat Burnell and I proposed a special one-day meeting on Drug Delivery to the Lungs, there was reticence to commit the funds in case of a lack of interest. Bear in mind that the first Respiratory Drug Delivery Congress took place that year in

Lexington, Kentucky with only 9 presented papers, and the first European Respiratory Society Congress did not happen until 1989! Accordingly, and well ahead of its time, the Committee arranged a test marketing event to coincide with a meeting of "The Breathing Club," a regular, respiratory clinical medicine, lunchtime meeting organized by the Royal Free Hospital. After a program of four presentations, the audience members were asked whether they would support a conference on the subject. Given that well over 100 people had attended, the answer was a foregone conclusion.

The first DDL Conference

Accordingly, the first DDL Conference took place the following year, in 1989. As Pat Burnell was now working at Glaxo (now Glaxo-SmithKline), they offered to host the event at their Ware, UK site, effectively becoming the first sponsor of the conference. Pat was no longer on the Committee, but with the help of others, formed a Conference Committee that organized the program, a practice which continues to this day. The venue, which could hold a maximum of 100 people, was fully booked ahead of time. Unfortunately, in those days, it was common practice for attendees to turn up and register and pay on the day. Pat witnessed an eminent Professor of Pharmacy brandishing the contents of his wallet at a security guard on the entrance to the site in an effort to gain admission! To accommodate the extra numbers, Pat persuaded the Glaxo staff attending to leave the meeting room and observe the entire conference from the projection room. I was the first speaker scheduled that day, but was severely

delayed by a traffic accident, and so had to relay messages on my progress via a succession of pay phones along the route. However, the Chairman for the day, Professor David Ganderton smoothly reorganized the program to cope.

The early 1990s

With such a successful start, there was little doubt that proposals for further one-day meetings would be well received by the Aerosol Society Committee. In 1990, DDL was hosted by Fisons (acquired by Rhone-Poulenc in 1995) at their Loughborough, UK site. On this occasion, snow disrupted rail travel so the meeting was delayed by two hours until the Chairman could arrive, along with many of the delegates. Nonetheless, the organizers persisted with a December date, as it avoided clashes with any other meeting, and European delegates had the bonus of Christmas shopping in the UK. In 1991, the meeting hosted by 3M at Loughborough University passed without incident, attracting 140 delegates and several exhibitors. However, in September 1992, The Aerosol Society found itself also hosting the Pan-European Aerosol Science Conference in Oxford. The committee members felt that they could not manage the organization of two significant meetings within such a short space of time, and so did not proceed with DDL that year, risking a loss of momentum for the Conference. However, the Committee need not have worried, as DDL returned successfully in 1993 with more than 100 delegates. The meeting was hosted by Astra (now AstraZeneca) at the Scandic Hotel in London, because they did not have a strong UK base at that time.

Similarly, Boehringer Ingelheim, the sponsors for the fifth meeting in 1994 did not have a large UK base, and so took DDL to the Church House Conference Centre in the heart of Westminster. This venue was an alternative seat of Parliament during air raids in the Second World War and is the venue for meetings of the Church Synod, the governing body of the Church of England. This was an atmospheric venue with easy access to central London and main transportation routes. It was such a success that this became the home of DDL for the next 10 years. Indeed, the next meeting became two days to accommodate the increasing numbers of speakers and poster presenters, while the number of exhibitors grew into double figures. This was also the first year that David Ganderton did not chair the entire conference. Unfortunately, the very success of the venue became its downfall, as the size of the conference outgrew the facilities available, particularly with the increasing need for exhibition space. As a result, in 2005, DDL moved to its present venue in Edinburgh, UK.

Progress in technology

Technology also moved on during this period. Early presentations were given using overhead projector acetates or 35 mm slides (glass mounted, if you wished to preserve them). Invitations to speak were typewritten and abstracts were limited to a single typed page, while illustrations were often hand-drawn. Remember that spreadsheets only came into common use at the end of the 1980s, while PowerPoint was not launched until 1990. It was DDL V, in 1994, that introduced multiple-page abstracts, but it was not until 1995 that bound copies of proceedings were produced, with an allocated ISBN identifier. Short abstracts of the presentations at DDL began appearing in the *Journal of Aerosol Medicine* in 1998 and continue to be published there today. It was also recognized that the quality of the proceedings deserved peer review of the submitted extended abstracts, which became an additional task for the Conference Organizing Committee and colleagues.

Supporting young scientists

Ever since its inception, one of the guiding principles that Pat Burnell instilled in the organizers was to encourage young scientists, both in presenting work in progress and encouraging PhD students to describe their thesis work. At the outset, the relatively small size of the conference encouraged healthy debate, and there were eminent scientists and academics who were unafraid to offer advice to the presenter. This could often lead a PhD student into a public cross-examination of their thesis material, but the work was always improved as a consequence. This interaction seemed more intense in Church House, where the main auditorium is circular, placing the speakers at the focus of the audience and very close to their inquisitors. Unfortunately, with larger audiences and auditoria, this level of interaction has diminished over time. Pat moved off the Organizing Committee after more than 10 years of service and tragically died in 2009. It is fitting that the Aerosol Society recognized her immense contribution by creating a Young Investigator's award in her name in 2010.

A global event

No one on that inaugural Committee could have envisaged how successful DDL would become, and how much it has contributed, not just to the respiratory field, but in helping the Aerosol Society support UK activities in all areas of this scientific discipline. Sandy Munro was recognized for his efforts in promoting DDL by being made an Honorary Member of The Aerosol Society in 2009. Despite consolidation in the pharmaceutical industry, with significant numbers of UK job losses in the respiratory field, the Conference remains a highly successful global event and continues to attract a high caliber of new scientific talent to the meetings, to sit alongside those who have remained in the field for far longer than they might have expected 26 years ago.

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