



OCTOBER 2014



A word from the chair

I'm not sure whether you managed to get to the statins event last month – Cholesterol: Are Statins The Only Answer? – but it certainly generated a huge amount of interest among the membership. In fact, the subject was so popular that we actually had to turn people away. But, if you were there, you'll know it was quite a debate, with discussions carrying on for hours, even as the RSM cleaned up around us!

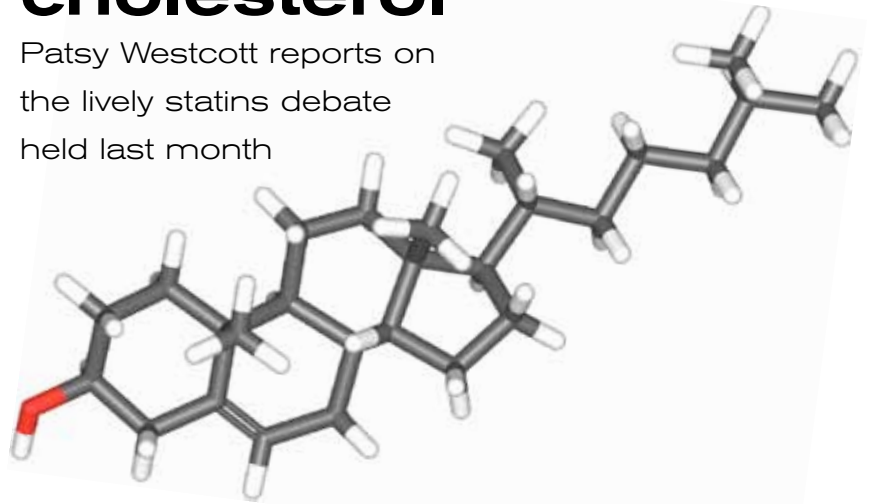
If you didn't make it, though, do read Patsy Westcott's report, on the right, which will certainly give you a flavour of just how polarised the experts' views were. Whatever your thinking on the subject, one thing's for sure: when it comes to statins the debate is going to rumble on and on, and I guarantee we're all going to be writing about it for some time to come...

Meanwhile, it isn't long to go to the Guild Christmas party so look out for a 'Save The Date' email from Jatinder, coming soon!

Michele

Bringing down cholesterol

Patsy Westcott reports on the lively statins debate held last month



We welcomed 60 guests to our event, CHOLESTEROL: ARE STATINS THE ONLY ANSWER? at the Royal Society of Medicine. Below are the key points from each speaker.

Cardiologist Professor Darrel Francis, of the National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College, asked:

- 1 Is there a benefit to taking statins?**
- 2 Can they be harmful?**
- 3 Is that all that matters?**

Stressing that large RCTs (Randomised Controlled Trials) are the best way to answer these questions he showed evidence that statins prevent heart attacks and strokes with minimal side effects. He concluded that personal choice is important, however, and that we all differ in our assessment of how many

extra years of life would induce us to take a drug, even a hypothetical one with no downsides.

Interventional cardiologist, Aseem Malhotra, said that he had been forced to reassess his thinking about heart disease risk factors. Saturated fats were not the major issue. He criticised US scientist, Ancel Keys, whose Seven Countries Study published in the 1960s was a key driver of the cholesterol hypothesis. Keys, he said, had cherry picked data and silenced researchers, such as John Yudkin, who blamed sugar.

The source of saturated fats is important, however, and we should focus on food and diet, rather than individual nutrients. He acknowledged that statins reduce risk in people who have had a heart attack but questioned their use in primary prevention.



Our line up of experts (from left to right): Darrel Francis, Mike Schachter, Bruce Griffin, Malcolm Kendrick and Aseem Malhotra

Bringing down cholesterol cont'd

Dr Mike Schachter, senior medical tutor at Imperial College, spoke of the recent furore in the British Medical Journal over statins, arguing that it is dangerous to call for a paper to be retracted simply because its results are displeasing. He challenged the idea that if withheld data from pharmaceutical companies were released it would close the statins debate.

Dr Schachter also said that the argument that drug companies stand to gain from more people taking statins was false as most statins prescribed are generic. And he questioned 'the new puritanism' that sees lifestyle change as preferable to a simple cheap pill. We need a spirit of scepticism and should be wary of dogma as there is a long history of doctors being 100 per cent wrong.

Macclesfield GP Malcolm Kendrick, author of *The Great Cholesterol Con*, argued that the

cholesterol hypothesis is wrong and contains many contradictions. He queried how cholesterol crosses the endothelium to get into the arteries and why atherosclerotic plaques only form in certain areas.

Dr Kendrick cited studies drawn from various countries showing that lower cholesterol is linked to a higher risk of heart disease and that a higher saturated fat intake prevents strokes. He also pointed

'... a higher cholesterol level in later life is linked with a lower risk of dementia, arguing that cholesterol protects against neurodegenerative diseases'

out that a higher cholesterol level in later life is linked with a lower risk of dementia, arguing that cholesterol protects against neurodegenerative diseases.

Bruce Griffin, professor of nutritional metabolism at the University of Surrey, said that diet and lifestyle must be the cornerstone of heart disease prevention. Although nutrition trials have their weaknesses, they

do show that replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats can reduce heart disease risk while replacing them with carbohydrates has no effect or may increase it.

However, saturated fats are not all the same – for example cheese lowers LDL cholesterol compared with butter. In light of what is known, the current UK guideline to make saturated fat 11 per cent of daily calories is about right.

Moreover, although not as some claim, toxic, sugar also contributes to heart disease risk – it's not either saturated fat/or sugar.



● With thanks to British Lion Eggs for the generous sponsorship of this event.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

Lisa Buckingham

... on the best of both worlds as a freelance health journalist

became a freelance health and fitness writer after having my first child in 2009. Up until the day I gave birth (quite literally – she came three

weeks early), I was Health Editor on Best magazine.

Freelancing has offered me the best of both worlds – the chance to keep my hand in on a career I'd worked hard to build and the chance to stay at home and bring up my kids (my son arrived in 2011).

It's been a juggle at times and, while I tried to stick to features with long deadlines so that I could just work during the kids' sleep times, that didn't always work out – I have been known to put them in front of CBeebies while I interview a consultant or two! And, of course, there are sometimes long evenings spent on my laptop when I have a tight deadline.

Now my daughter is at school and my son has just started part-time nursery, so I have much more time to work and attend press events. It feels great to be branching out and writing for magazines and papers that I haven't worked for before.

I only have four hours a day in which to work (less on a run day), but I find that a run really clears my head, so I drop the kids off in my running kit and go out for a quick run before settling at my desk in the living room. I usually start work at 9:45 and finish just before lunchtime to go and pick up my son.

I do miss the banter of an office but freelancing means I can write for a broad range of publications on everything from winterproofing your running to ovarian cancer. It also enables me to be there at school pick-up time. If my dream job came up (Health Director at Red, please), I might consider going back to the office but for now I'm content



with not having to deal with the logistics of before and after-school childcare.

I've learned two important lessons from freelancing. The first is tenacity!

If I don't hear back from a commissioning editor after sending an idea, I'll email again and ask if it's of interest. I hated doing that to start with, but I remember from when I was commissioning that if I didn't reply to an email from a freelancer as soon as I got it, it would slip my mind. A reminder is often welcome.

The second is that I've learned not to read too much into a lack of response when I submit a feature.

I don't always get feedback on the stuff I write, as I did in the office. When I started out, I would check my email every 20 seconds to see if they liked it, but now I take no news as good news.

CALLING ALL MEMBERS!

If you know of any PRs or companies who would like to offer discounts to members, please do let us know. Contact Jatinder at the Guild office.

MEMBERS' NEWS



DR CARRIE RUXTON wins award for nutrition writing

A Guild of Health Writers member, Dr Ruxton recently won the CN Writer of the Year award from Complete Nutrition magazine. The annual award is given following nominations and an open vote from CN readers.

On receiving her award at a London ceremony, Carrie said: 'It is great to receive recognition from peers in the

nutrition world as there are few opportunities in freelance work to gain feedback on what you write. I love translating complex nutrition science into practical articles which health professionals can use in their work so it's lovely to have an award for something I enjoy doing anyway'. Carrie is well-known by many Guild members due to her work on the Health Supplements Information Service and the Meat Advisory Panel which have sponsored previous Guild events.

I tried every diet in the book. I tried some that weren't in the book. I tried eating the book. It tasted better than most of the diets

Dolly Parton

A new guide to dementia



MARY JORDAN'S

first venture into writing was a handbook on fundholding for GP practice managers. She then moved into the world of medical

books and journals. Now widowed, she works for the Alzheimer's Society and is also an associate director of End of Life Management (ELM). Her latest title, to be published in early November,

is **The Essential Carers' Guide to Dementia** (£14.99, Hammersmith Health Books).
 ● www.maryjordan.co.uk/

EILEEN MURPHY has recently set up a new website:



www.mseileenmurphy.co.uk/

... log on to: www.maryclairemason.co.uk/blog-articles to read Mary-Claire's latest post about HRT.



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