

BAAB Education Day 2022

BAAB's 2022 education day was held this year on 30th June, at the Lumen URC venue near King's Cross. It was the first time that we had been able to meet in person since the beginning of the pandemic in 2019, and it was fantastic to be able to see people again, share the talks, delicious food and have face to face conversations. The day was enjoyed by about 20 people, including course directors and members of several different colleges, and representatives from the BAcC and BAAB. Covid is sadly still not over, and it made its impact felt as Harriet Lansdown, BAAB's chief accreditation officer and the event organiser, and our chair Mike Saks both tested positive, and so were sadly unable to come. Paul Probyn, the accreditation officer for BAAB stepped in and chaired the proceedings with his customary consummate skill.

The focus for the day was on Mental Health. Higher Education has faced an unprecedented speed of change over the period of the pandemic. As a result, the experience for students of attending university level courses over the last three years has altered beyond recognition when they adapted (very swiftly) from working in person to distance learning. It is a testament to the commitment to excellence of the acupuncture course providers, and the resilience of the cohorts of students who have lived through this time, that they have managed to successfully complete their studies and take their place as acupuncture practitioners and members of the BAcC.

The legacy of Covid is not just about physical disruption and educational change, it has also left scars on the mental health of the nation. Levels of anxiety and of diagnosable mental health problems have soared, with many more people reporting feeling stressed to the point of being overwhelmed. Alongside 'Long Covid', and all the physical symptoms associated with it, we now also have 'Covid19 Anxiety Syndrome', where people live with a combination of social anxiety when meeting with people in person and obsessive-compulsive hand washing.

Our first speaker was Tony Sigrist, who is an acupuncturist, and a passionate mental health campaigner. He set up ['Talking Freely'](#), a mental health charity which focusses on facilitating open discussion about mental health, and losing the stigma that surrounds these discussions, particularly for men. In his talk, Tony spoke from the heart about his own experience and mental health journey from burnt-out police officer to acupuncturist and mental health campaigner. He shared some of the insights that he has gained as a trainer in ['Mental Health first Aid'](#), which teaches people how to recognise mental health red flags, and what to do about them. He explained that sometimes there are external stressors at work which no amount of acupuncture or therapy can resolve, and it's important to be able to clearly see the strengths and limitations of what we offer within the clinic. He also works within companies to help them develop good mental health support networks so that their employees thrive, and his experience in this field stimulated a lively discussion at the end. There were lots of questions around how to develop those kinds of mental health networks within the acupuncture colleges, the BAcC and the wider acupuncture profession.

Shelley Berlinski is qualified as an acupuncturist and MD. She teaches at The City College of Acupuncture and runs a busy acupuncture clinic in North London. In her workshop 'Planning your teaching to support mental health and well-being', we worked in four groups looking at ways to embed mental well-being into the curriculum. We also explored how to plan the curriculum and assessments in a way that would maintain academic rigour, whilst reducing stress levels for both teachers and students. Each group

explored ideas around the particular issues facing new students, students developing their skills as practitioners in a clinical environment, how different learning strategies affect the level of stress involved in learning, and how different types of assessment bring their own stressors depending on peoples preferred learning styles. At the end of the workshop, we came back together to share what we had discussed, with many valuable and useful ideas and insights coming out of the workshop.

In the last half hour before our (delicious!) lunch, we shared favourite websites that we use for teaching and organising information.

<https://peerwise.cs.auckland.ac.nz/> students write multiple choice questions for each other. Can be used to get them to assess each other's questions, rate them, teacher can come in and make comments and check for question validity. Can be used as an assessment tool. Free

<https://www.focusmate.com/> allows for shared online focussed sessions. You book a meeting with someone else at a particular time who is also available, and you study together for 50 minutes. Like a mini zoom- one minute of saying what you want to do, 48 minutes of work, one minute of saying how that went. Cheap

<https://www.jotform.com/> creates forms that you can use easily, can be booking forms, fully editable, can act as a register, student surveys, can automatically be directed to a particular email address, GDPR compliant. Different pricing levels

<https://www.equator-network.org/> gives all the information needed to how to critically assess different types of papers.

After a very happy lunch spent eating and talking with people who hadn't had the chance to see each other for years, Felicity Moir started the afternoon session by talking about the updates that have been made to the BAC Educational Standards. She talked us through the changes, along with the context for them. Our educational standards have recently been very favourably compared to the equivalent document in the US, and this solid educational foundation means that BAC members will be able to go to the US and achieve equivalence and the right to practice.

Felicity also talked about the use of gender-inclusive language in education, following the [lead of the UN](#). How to implement the use of gender-neutral language (e.g., they/them instead of he/him), and the difference between sex (biologically male/female) and gender (social identity as a man or a woman) are issues that are very current within the Higher Education sector. She showed how the language that we use can impact on how accepted our patients feel, and this led to an interesting discussion about how we could present case histories for our students using non-binary language.

Paul Probyn spoke next with a talk entitled 'Student Mental Health: Limits and Boundaries?'. Paul has worked in accreditation and quality assurance for many years and was responsible for setting up a Student WellBeing team at the Royal Veterinary College in London as a way for them to address the ever-increasing levels of mental health challenges that students in the 'Covid generation' are facing. Mental health problems that impact on a person's ability to study are considered a disability, which is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Academic institutions are therefore required by law to offer appropriate support and make reasonable adjustments to enable those students to participate in their studies, just as they would for a physical disability. Paul explained what is (and isn't) legally required and gave some instances of situations in which adjustments can be made, particularly with assessments.

The final talk of the day was given by Vivien Shaw, who has just been appointed as a new accreditation officer for BAAB, taking over from Paul who is retiring from the role. Her presentation 'Student well-being: the value of community' focussed on different ways in which the methods that you use to teach can encourage students to get to know each other, the students in the years above and below them, and the staff. The aim is to build a thriving, vibrant 'Community of Inquiry', where all students feel included and find their place within the learning community that is their college. She gave examples of different teaching techniques for use in person, and online, with one of the highlights being 'doughnut lectures', where you provide doughnuts in between lectures and encourage staff to come and help the students eat them. Other topics were on how to use video and a YouTube channel for practice consultations, different

ideas for using online discussion boards, holding poster sessions and mini conferences for dissertation students, and organising online writing retreats. The discussion afterwards generated many more examples from the teaching practises of the highly experienced teachers that were attending, and it was a very rich and valuable way of sharing good practice.

It was a hugely enjoyable day, and the feedback included phrases like 'lots of tangible takeaways', 'good levels of information linked to some very stimulating ideas', 'excellent discussions - enjoyed'. It was the first education day that I have attended, and I'm very much looking forward to the next one!

Dr Vivien Shaw, Accreditation Officer