

International Biometric Society (British Region)

Secretary's Report, 2003-2004

This has been a busy year, including five Ordinary meetings of the Region, the attendance by many from the Region at the IBC in Cairns, and planning by the Regional Committee for two future conferences.

Following the successful Regional Conference in September 2003, the autumn meeting (203rd Ordinary Meeting) of the British Region was only a half-day meeting in November. This meeting included the 2003 AGM, which was followed by a paper on "Biometrical issues in the Farm Scale Evaluations of Genetically Modified Herbicide-Tolerant Crops" by Joe Perry, Peter Rothery and Suzanne Clark (Rothamsted Research and CEH Monks Wood), and two papers on spatial statistics – "Bayesian estimation for percolation models of disease spread in plant communities" by Gavin Gibson (Heriot-Watt University), and "Spatially varying coefficient models in ecological studies of environment and health" by Nicky Best, Sara Morris, Sylvia Richardson (Imperial College School of Medicine). The meeting was attended by about 36 members and guests.

The second meeting of the year was a joint meeting with PSI in February 2004 on "Biomarkers and Surrogates", organised for the British Region by James Carpenter and Trevor Smart. The meeting included talks on "Biomarkers - What, Why, When" and a little bit of How by Peter Colman (Pfizer Global R&D), "Genomics studies, paths to finding new disease targets and biomarkers" by Brian Bond (GlaxoSmithKline), "PoM – PoC – PoE : A case study" by Dr Roland Fisch (Novartis), "Statistical Validation of Surrogate Endpoints in Clinical Trials" by Didier Renard (Eli Lilly and Co Ltd), "Studies to evaluate potential biomarkers for use in early clinical trials" by Trevor Smart (Pfizer), "PSIngs of Success" by Rob Hemmings (MHRA) and "Potential surrogate markers in cancer research- some considerations and examples" by Stephen W. Duffy (Cancer Research UK and Queen Mary College London). The meeting was attended by about 60 delegates and considered a great success. It is planned to have further joint meetings with PSI in the near future.

The 205th Ordinary Meeting was a special meeting held at the Royal Society of Edinburgh in memory of Rob Kempton. The meeting started with tributes to Rob's contributions to BioSS (Gavin Gibson, ex-BioSS) and the IBS (Andrew Mead, IBS-BR Secretary & Geert Molenberghs, IBS President), including the presentation of the IBS Honorary Memorial Award to Rob's family. The remainder of the meeting celebrated the range of areas of biometrics to which Rob had contributed through his career and included presentations on "The statistically diverse environment" by Ron Smith (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Edinburgh), "Design of field experiments in the presence of interference between treatments" by Rosemary Bailey (Queen Mary College, University of London), "Crop cultivar breeding and evaluation: a review of current statistical methods" by Brian Cullis and Alison Smith (Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute, NSW, Australia), "Applications of Markov random fields in biometry" by Julian Besag (University of Washington, Seattle, USA), "Modelling neighbour effects with plant height in variety trials" by Olivier David (Unité BIA, INRA, France), "Multivariate analysis of ecological communities" by Cajo ter Braak (Biometris, Wageningen University and Research Centre, Wageningen, The Netherlands), "Estimation and Presentation of Risk" by Robert Curnow (Emeritus Professor of Applied Statistics, University of Reading). The meeting was again well-attended (58 delegates), including many of Rob's colleagues from BioSS and elsewhere in the British Region.

Two meetings were held in Oxford in June. The first was a “traditional” summer meeting of the Region to an Open Day at the Clinical Trial Service Unit (CTSU) and Epidemiological Studies Unit within the Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine at the University of Oxford. This was a joint meeting with the Oxford local group of the RSS, organised by Sarah Darby. The meeting included short talks by a number of staff members from CTSU about a range of current studies in progress. The second meeting (the 207th Ordinary Meeting) was a celebration of the 80th birthday of Sir David Cox, organised jointly with the RSS. Seven talks were given, three on areas to which David has made great contributions throughout his career, and four by younger biometricians specifically chosen by David. The talks were on “Randomization in stages” by Rosemary Bailey (Queen Mary College, University of London), “Analysing the associations between phylogenetic traits” by Andrew Mead (Warwick HRI, University of Warwick), “Analysis of the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong” by Christl Donnelly (Imperial College, London), “Pseudo-observations and the Cox regression model”, by Per Kragh Andersen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark), “Estimation of the excess risk of radiation-induced breast cancer mortality associated with mammographic screening before age 50” by Dr Amy Berrington (Cancer Research UK Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford), “Estimating the hazard ratio in a clinical trial with time-dependent departures from randomised allocation” by Ian White (MRC Biostatistics Unit, Cambridge), and “Statistical inference since 1950” by Anthony Davison (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne). The meeting finished with a response to all seven papers by Sir David. Both meetings were again well-attended (129 at the CTSU Open Day and 88 at the Cox 80th Birthday meeting).

The other major activities of the year have been the planning of a second Regional Conference and the preparation of the bid to host IBC 2008 at University College Dublin. The second Regional Conference is being jointly organised with the Belgian, Netherlands and French Regions of the IBS, and will be held at the University of Leicester from 5th to 8th April 2005. The invited programme has now been finalised, including sessions on Bioinformatics, Climate Change, Microarrays, Biometry in the EU and Biometry in Society. A call for contributed papers will go out in late November/early December, when registration information will also be available.

The bid to host IBC 2008 was prepared by Andrew Mead (IBS-BR), John Hinde (NUI Galway) and Gabrielle Kelly (UCD) in collaboration with Conference Partners, a professional conference organiser based in Dublin. The bid was submitted in early May, and a presentation made to the Conference Advisory Committee (CAC) at the IBC in Cairns in July. The British Region bid was recommended by CAC, and recently approved by IBS Council. The British Region committee will be working closely with the Local Organising Committee (chaired by John Hinde) to develop plans for the conference, and welcomes active support from all members of the British Region, particularly in attracting sponsors and exhibitors.

As always the committee welcomes comments on our plans and suggestions from the membership. Finally I would like to thank my fellow officers and committee members for their support and enthusiasm during the last year, and look forward to further challenges in the next year.

Andrew Mead
18 October 2004