

Drafting and submitting a good motion

From idea to motion

It is useful for anyone drafting a motion to bear in mind the ‘three Ps’, as these provide an outline structure for the motion:

Problem

What is the problem that needs to be solved

Principle

What principles underlie the solution

Proposals

What are the proposals that must be the heart of the motion

Questions to ask when drafting a motion

- Is there a problem? What is it?
- What is the solution?
- What needs to be done to achieve the solution? e.g. gathering evidence, further research, more funding, etc.
- Think about what you want to persuade the conference to agree to.
- Can the BMA:
 - Solve the problem itself?
 - Ask someone/something to take action?
 - Raise awareness of the problem/its solution?
- Are the issues you wish to raise applicable to all junior doctors working in all parts of the UK? If so, you should remember to include reference to bodies/organisations across the four nations and not just the organisation/body with jurisdiction for your region.

What does a motion look like?

All motions at the conference should begin as follows;

“That this conference...”

Then you need a verb. What is the conference being asked to do? Some suggestions include; “appeals”; “asks”; “calls”; “demands”; “believes”; “considers”; “deems”; “judges”; “regards”; “backs”; “cares”; “defends”; “endorses”; “upholds”; “notes”; “recognises”; “is appalled”

The art of motion writing

Writing a good and effective motion is not a simple task. Motions should be clear, succinct and have a clear action. Motions that are likely to be passed or will encourage an important debate are more likely to be included in the agenda.

Your regional junior doctor committee chair should be able to help you with drafting an effective motion. The BMA also offers a motion writing advisory service which you can contact if you are having difficulty or are in doubt about the wording of a motion, this is available by emailing motions@bma.org.uk. The conference agenda committee can also provide advice on the quality of motions.

Types of motions

Single point motions

At its most basic, a motion can simply be a statement; the aim in this case is to persuade the conference to agree with the statement.

e.g. "That this conference condemns research fraud" (This is unlikely to generate any argument, but makes clear the conference position and policy).

Statement motions with more than one point

More common are motions which make a statement, but perhaps have two or more points. In order for these motions to pass, the proposer has to persuade the forum to agree with all the points they contain.

e.g. "That this conference believes that dogs are better than cats and that cats should be eliminated".

In this case the person proposing the motion would have to outline the reasons why conference should agree to both the belief that dogs are better than cats and the belief that cats should be eliminated. It may be the case that the forum agrees that 'dogs are better than cats', but that it doesn't agree that cats should be eliminated. The forum would therefore not agree with the motion, and it would not be passed.

Parts

Dividing the points of a motion up into parts allows the points of your argument to be separated out, and to be passed (or fall) separately. Dividing a motion into parts also helps to simplify more complex motions.

e.g. "That this conference notes that dogs are better than cats and supports:

- (i) the elimination of cats;
- (ii) the subsidisation of dog food
- (iii) tax breaks for dog owners

Each clause must be able to stand separately when added to the stem. The proposer might manage to convince the conference to support the statement that 'dogs are better than cats', but not manage to persuade the forum to support the elimination of cats. The conference could then agree that dog food should be subsidised, but disagree with dog owners receiving tax breaks. If it was agreed to vote on the motion in parts, then part (ii) would be passed, but parts (i) and (iii) would fall.

Common problems with motions

1. The clauses don't follow on from the stem.

Make sure that each individual clause in your motion makes sense if it is put directly after the stem, even if other parts of the motion are rejected.

2. Lack of clarity

Ideally, a motion will be passed, become a resolution and direct the policy of the BMA. When you speak to the motion, you can add more details to back up your argument, but the motion needs to be clear about what it is referring to, what it is calling to be done, and by whom.

Make sure that you expand any acronyms the first time you use them.

The conference agenda committee and secretariat will occasionally make amendments to motions to make them clearer, but if they don't know what the motion is trying to say, they will not be able to improve it.

3. Asking for things which aren't possible

If your motion asks someone or something to take action, make sure that they are in a position to take that action.

For example, you can't ask that the BMA introduces a specific regulation governing the work of nurses, because:

- a) the BMA is not a regulatory body and
- b) the BMA is an organisation for doctors, not nurses.

What you could ask the BMA to do would be to lobby the Nursing and Midwifery Council to introduce a specific regulation governing the work of nurses. The BMA is able to lobby other bodies, so this would be realistic.

4. Not being succinct

The fewer points that your motion makes, the fewer points there are for people to disagree with – and the more likely that it will be passed. Try to be as succinct as possible. Remember that when you speak to the motion you can expand and explain why you have asked for something. But *do* make sure that you include enough information for it to make sense when read alone!

5. Don't include your speech in the motion

You will need to propose your motion to the other conference delegates in a short speech. This is your chance to expand upon the motion and explain to other members why they should vote for it. You may be tempted when wording your motion to include some of what you plan to say for your speech (i.e. reasons the motion should pass, or background to the motion), but this will convolute the motion unnecessarily. The best motions that go on to become BMA policy are precise and to the point.

6. Avoid the use of factoids

A factoid is an item of unreliable information that is reported and repeated so often that it is assumed to be factual. Motions that contain such anecdotal facts cannot be validated, and there is a high risk that they will not be able to form part of BMA policy. They are also an easy target for speakers against your motion.

Submitting motions

When you have drafted a motion, you should send it to your regional committee chair or other representatives who will submit it to the agenda committee for consideration. Details of your regional committee members can be found at www.bma.org.uk/rjdc