

*Fighting for our rights, fighting for our future*

# Board of science report to ARM

## Change of leadership

After more than five years of leadership, **Professor Dame Parveen Kumar** stood down from her position as chair of the board of science at the beginning of 2022.

A new process was put in place to appoint her successor, where members from across the BMA were encouraged to submit their applications for this position. After a series of interviews of shortlisted candidates, I (**Dr David Strain**) was declared the new board chair in January 2022.

In addition to this, the outgoing deputy chair **Professor JS Bamrah** has been succeeded by **Dr Melody Redman**. We would like to take this opportunity to thank both our former chair and deputy chair for all they have done while leading the board, and express our sincere commitment to continue their good work.

## New priorities

The board has worked together to develop a new workplan that focusses on **three key priorities** at any one time (with resilience built in to respond to emerging policy developments relevant to the board's remit and historical work). After discussion and debate, we decided that these would be:

- Suicide prevention
- Addressing the health impact of economic inequality
- Underscoring the link between dental and broader bodily health

Conversations on how to take this work forward in the new session have already started to take place, with a particular focus on collaboration between the board and their British Dental Association (BDA) equivalent on the latter priority.

## Events

In September 2021, Professor Dame Parveen Kumar chaired the annual Victor Horsley lectures:

- [Obesity: causes and consequences](#) (with speaker Professor Sadaf Farooqi)
- [The alcohol pandemic: before and after Covid-19](#) (with speaker Professor Ian Gilmore)
- [Why the Paris treaty can be a public health treaty](#) (with speaker Dr Maria Neira)

In October 2021, the BMA and World Medical Association (WMA) co-hosted a two-day scientific session exploring the subject of anti-microbial resistance (AMR). Professor Dame Parveen Kumar chaired both days, as experts from across the globe offered their insights in how to address this international threat to health.

In June 2022, the board joined forces with the BMA's public health medicine committee (PHMC) to host a roundtable to explore if universal basic income (UBI) could help improve health outcomes. Representatives from 12 BMA committees came together to hear speakers from Finland, Scotland and Wales, and consider whether the association should actively promote UBI.

## **Lobbying and engagement work**

Over the course of the session, board members have attended a range of engagement events to promote the board and broader BMA policy on areas including obesity, long COVID, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), rural health and social care, and tobacco. On the latter point, deputy chair Dr Melody Redman took part in a Tobacco Control Independent Review Academia roundtable in February 2022, and I had a follow up meeting with the review's chair, Javed Khan.

After attending the parliamentary launch of the APPG report on ME, I participated in the round table event with the Secretary of State Sajid Javid, the Chief Scientific Advisor Lucy Chappell, representatives of National Institute for Health and Care Research, Medical Research Council, Wellcome Trust, discussing the interplay between ME and long COVID, and how the current research strategy into long COVID may be extended to include those with ME.

Dr Melody Redman has worked with PHMC deputy chair Dr Tamasin Knight to discuss the BMA's lobbying around the online harms bill, following an ARM motion calling for better safeguarding of children from possible sexual harassment or abuse. The BMA's public affairs and population health policy teams have spoken to other charities about next steps regarding this bill. The association will shortly be submitting evidence to the commons committee, outlining its recommendations regarding the legislation.

I have also co-signed letters and statements on behalf of the board, including (but not limited to):

- A statement coordinated by the health, care and benefits advice sector demanding reform of investigations into death and serious harm linked to the benefits system (Rethink Mental Illness)
- A letter to Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead, regarding the review into ethnic inequalities in medical devices (BMA)
- An open letter to the ministers for health calling for the immediate publication of the sugar reduction report (Sustain)

In addition to this, I offered quotes on the subject of tobacco control (most recently in

response to the publication of the Khan review), and the deputy chair was quoted in the BMA's press release on the online harms bill.

Representatives from the board and the BMA's medical academic staff committee (MASC) have also met with the Academy of Medical Sciences (AoMS) to consider potential areas of joint working.

## **Blogs**

Over the last few months, the board has produced a series of blogs, exploring a range of population health concerns. The links to them are as follows:

- [The right support can reduce levels of obesity](#)
- [Stub out smoking](#) (exploring ways to counter tobacco use)
- [When the gloves come off](#) (exploring the necessity of reducing unnecessary plastic glove use, as part of glove awareness week)
- [Justice and pragmatism: how global vaccination secures long life for all](#) (co-written with Dr Kitty Mohan, BMA international committee chair)
- [My loneliness is killing me: the devastating health effects of social isolation](#)
- [Known unknowns, and as yet medically unexplained diseases](#) (exploring ME, long Covid, the limits of medical knowledge, and the need to work with patients when it comes to diseases with no explanation)

## **Final words**

Finally, on behalf of the board, I would like to formally express thanks to all the staff members from across the BMA who have supported our work, including our secretariat, the population health team, the head of public health and healthcare Lena Levy, and our colleagues in the BMA's public relations and media teams. We are excited to continue to work with all of you as we gear up to the start of a new, exciting session.

Dr David Strain  
Chair, Board of Science committee  
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