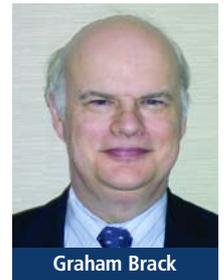# CLARION CALL

A section for passionate calls for action to further develop the role of pharmacists

Producing A Poster

Graham Brack, Pharmaceutical Adviser, NHS Kernow Clinical Commissioning Group
Email: graham.brack1@nhs.net

Graham Brack

Summary

This paper:

- explains the importance of posters being well presented

- outlines the format required for posters presented at the Pharmacy Management Forum including size, layout, paper quality, illustrations, etc.

- provides a source for additional reading.

The guidance

One of the most popular features of the Pharmacy Management National Forum is the Learning Zone, where over eighty posters are exhibited. Pharmacy Management offers help to people in creating their posters, but it may be useful to capture some guidance here. While the focus is on posters for the Forum, it is intended to have wider application.

The challenge

The number of posters offered exceeds the available space. There is therefore a weeding process at which posters are considered at face value; that is, they must speak for themselves because you will not be there to explain them.

Remember too that, if you are successful, your poster will be one of more than eighty. Allowing some time on arrival, most attendees will have around 2½ hours to view all the posters, so a little maths suggests that they must spend less than two minutes on each

one. If they are very interested, they may spend up to five. To balance that out, they must spend less than two minutes on others. You must therefore grab their attention in the first half minute. These sums also remind us of another basic fact: if it takes more than three minutes to read your poster, it will not be read. The average adult reads around 250 words per minute, so that suggests that a total of 750-800 words would be right for most posters.

The basics

The first and most obvious rule is to follow the organisers' guidance about format and theme. Logistically, it is much easier to plan a poster session where all the posters are the same size and orientation, so for many events that will be fixed. For the National Forum we want A0 posters in a portrait orientation – that means they are 1189mm high by 841mm wide – and the theme of the event is medicines optimisation. Despite this we are offered posters of different sizes, some of them landscape, and some which have no obvious medicines optimisation link.

It may be possible to rewrite some submissions to give the medicines optimisation focus. An example was an account of a switch programme. Switch programmes are not generally of interest to us, because we focus on value rather than cost. In this case, audits before and after the switch had demonstrated that the same quality of care could be provided at lower cost; that is a value

measurement, so the poster could be redrafted to emphasise that.

We advise 240gsm satin paper, but we accept that not all printers stock this weight and some charge a premium for it. Your poster needs to be robust enough not to crease in transit and to stand up to wear and tear while on display. Some of the posters last year were printed on 160gsm paper and then laminated, which gives a result very similar to using 240gsm. Incidentally, an A0 sheet has a surface area of one square metre, so if you use 240gsm paper, your poster will weigh 240g.

The content

The National Forum is a place to share ideas. We hope that delegates' imagination will be spurred by what they see. It is not a scientific congress and therefore while we expect integrity and appropriate processes in the work, we do not necessarily expect it to be finished. A poster might present interim results of ongoing work, for example:

John thinks that in some elderly patients medicines adherence might be aided if their medicines had fluorescent yellow labels so they were easily spotted. His outcome measure is that they will order and use appropriate amounts over a year, but he conducts a six-month check to see whether his hypothesis is sensible. His results at that point may be of interest to others – if it looks like his idea is

working, we would want to adopt it elsewhere, and if it is not, then that is useful knowledge for anyone else who was thinking of a similar project.

The topic of the poster is obviously key to its success, but it is also important to report it in the best way. Graphs and charts may save you a lot of words, besides breaking up the text. While it is not necessary to reproduce all the elements of a scientific report such as we all learned at university – abstract, introduction, methods, results and discussion – there needs to be a logical flow to the text. An abstract placed at the end can replace the results section, and most readers do not need a detailed description of the method – they can use the contact details to ask you for that if they want it. References should be kept to the minimum; unless the organiser specifies otherwise, a statement that references are available on request will suffice.

Anything that aids quick comprehension of your poster is helpful. That includes use of images, but it also suggests that active rather than passage language is better – so, 'We checked the children's inhaler technique' is easier to read quickly than 'The inhaler technique of the children was checked by members of the project team'. Use shorter sentence lengths than you would in a formal report. Think tabloid rather than broadsheet. Focus on key points and don't say anything that doesn't need saying, because more material may mean less communication. "Look out!" is more useful to us than "A runaway Vauxhall Astra is approaching you from behind at about 25 mph."

The presentation

Remember that the acid test is whether your poster can comfortably be read from a normal distance, usually 1.2-1.5 metres away. If readers have to stand closer, then they will block the sight of others, so you will gain one viewer but lose out on many more. You can gain some idea of your

poster's impact by printing your A0 poster on a single A4 sheet of paper. If you can't read it, your text is probably too small.

Plenty of white space helps to give your poster impact. It is called white space for a reason – fluorescent paper does not work well, because it is too uncomfortable to read lots of text on it. Resist the temptation to use multiple typefaces – one serif and one sans-serif font in various sizes will suit most purposes, and some people will only use one font throughout. While images are good, watermarks are generally distracting; if they are clear enough to read, they normally interfere with reading the overlaid text.

Colour adds interest. For the Forum we ask for a headline strip with the poster title, authors and their contact details. If you want to add an organisational logo, this is a good place, but make sure that you use an image of at least 300dpi resolution or it will look blurred when printed.

You know your material, so when you look at your poster you will naturally read the sections in the right order. It is worth testing a mock-up with colleagues to see whether they can grasp the flow of the text. Text is difficult to read if it extends right across the poster so usually columns or blocks are used. We will naturally start at top left, but do we then go down the column, or across to the next block? Arrows or visual cues can help to ensure that your readers follow the correct order.

Do not expect the printers or event organisers to proof-read or edit your text. Check it carefully yourself, and it is a good idea to ask someone unconnected with the work to do the same. They will spot jargon or unfamiliar acronyms that might be very clear to you. For example, you may use DTP to mean Direct To Patient, whereas your readers may think it means Desk-Top Publishing.

The majority of posters are prepared using PowerPoint, simply because it is widely accessible. Using Page Setup, set the size of the slide to A0 dimensions

(1189mm x 841mm). Unfortunately, you cannot rely on the screen contents printing exactly as shown, but your chances of doing so are increased if documents, drawings, charts and tables are converted to images before adding to the slide, rather than directly embedding them. Printing to PDFs will achieve this or you can scan a high quality print.

Embed items rather than linking them. When you send your poster to the printer, the linked items will be missing. If you copy and paste elements, they will be embedded.

The way that computers are set up may affect the way that PowerPoint images display. It is therefore possible that when you send your poster to the printer it will display differently to the way you intended. It is therefore a good idea to convert your slide to a PDF before submitting it.

Some key points

- Your poster displays your innovative idea.
- Keep it clear and concise.
- Follow the organiser's directions.
- A picture saves a lot of words.
- Make sure the content flows correctly.
- Ask a colleague to check a mock-up.

Additional reading

There is much useful information at http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters.

Declaration of interests

- ● Professional Adviser to Pharmacy Management, in which capacity he is responsible for the selection of posters for the Learning Zone at the Pharmacy Management National Forum, and for supporting their authors.
- ● Member of the Pharmacy Management Advisory Board
- ● Member of the Editorial Board for the Pharmacy Management Journal
- ● Managing Director of Michael Meagher Ltd.
- ● Director, TMS Pharmacy Ltd.