

BERM scientific conferences: still important after all the years?

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From my earliest days as an undergraduate I have been aware of the important role that scientific conferences play in the world of analytical chemistry. In the beginning it was a real treat to be able to go and spend a day or possibly two listening to reports of the latest developments in a particular sector. Then, some months later, read the published article in the proceedings of the conference. Other than by visiting another university, institute or laboratory, there was no real way to find out what was new. Research, it seemed, moved at a leisurely pace in those days.

I left university and moved into the NHS, then into industry. I still visited conferences, but wearing a commercial hat as I realised that putting a small table top display in the lobby of the meeting venue was a very cost effective way of meeting senior research workers who were otherwise difficult to contact, and I could listen to the presentations as well, keeping up to date with all that was new.

In the mid 1990s I became involved in the organisation of a scientific conference, BERM 9: the ninth time a group of scientists got together to look at new developments in the area of biological and environmental reference materials. I then realised, rather quickly, just how much work goes into the organisation of a meeting and how important commercial sponsorship is. Put bluntly, without commercial and public body support, most scientific meetings would either not happen or be restricted to the very few people who could afford to pay €500 a day to attend.

The BERM series of symposia go back more than a few years, when discussions started between Dr Wayne Wolf, then a young research scientist at the US Department of Agriculture, Dr Herbert Munteau, a scientist at the EU Joint Research Centre at Ispra, Italy, and Dr Markus Stoeppler, in charge of the Environmental Specimen Bank at the KFA Institute at Jülich, Germany. They were all interested in reference materials, how to prepare stable matrix materials, how to assign values and produce meaningful certificates of analysis. This shared interest led to a decision to hold a scientific meeting. So in September 1983 BRM 1 (Biological Reference Materials 1) took place. Organised by Wayne Wolf it was held in Philadelphia, USA, and attracted 25 delegates who listened to 16 papers. Three years later, in April 1986, BRM 2 was held in Jülich, Germany, where 111 delegates listened to 35 papers and visited a poster presentation. The proceedings were published in *Fresenius' Journal of analytical Chemistry* and the organisation was by Drs Wolf and Stoeppler.

Over the next 10 years the BRM Symposia expanded into the BERM Symposia as environmental issues became ever more important. The meetings were held alternately in Europe and North America, as follows:

- BRM 3: May 1988, Bayreuth, Germany
- BERM 4: Feb. 1990, Orlando, USA
- BERM 5: May 1992, Aachen, Germany
- BERM 6: April 1994, Kona, Hawaii, USA
- BERM 7: April 1997, Antwerp, Belgium
- BERM 8: Sept. 2000, Bethesda, USA

BERM 9: June 2003, Berlin, Germany¹
BERM 10: May 2006, Charleston, 2006²

I first attended BERM 5 and became involved with the organisation of BERM 7, then BERM 9 and recently discovered that I would be involved with BERM 12, which will take place in May 2009 in Oxford. It follows the first BERM Meeting in Asia, BERM 11,³ which takes place in a few months in November 2007 at Tsukuba, Japan.

The BERM 12 Organisation Committee met for the first time during July 2007 and is already looking at exactly how to arrange what is expected to be an event running over four days and attended by upwards of 300 delegates. The BERM 12 website will be up and running soon where we will be putting up an outline programme and other details. But as with any scientific meeting there are two key external contributions that are essential to the meeting: speakers and sponsors.

So, if you would like to contribute to the scientific programme in any way or be a sponsor let me know: until the website is ready you can contact the BERM 12 Organising Committee by e-mailing: UKBERM2009@aol.com

We really would be delighted to hear from you!

Web references

1. BERM 9: http://www.spectroscopyeurope.com/RM_15_1.pdf and <http://www.eurolab.org/berm9/BERM9%20Final%20Flyer.pdf>
2. BERM 10: <http://www.csc.noaa.gov/berm/>
3. BERM 11: <http://www.nmij.jp/berm11/home-e.html>