

ON THE PODIUM

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Making Medical Conferences Run Like Clockwork
An Interview with:

— **David Penford** —

CLOCKWORK
MEDICAL



With over 30 years in the events industry, what inspired you to focus specifically on medical conferences and education?

One of the key things is dealing with professionals who are passionate about what they do, in the majority of cases it's not just a job but a passion. The work they do makes a real positive impact on the lives of people and their outcomes. They are keen to share their knowledge and remain at the cutting edge of innovations in surgery and rehabilitation.

Clockwork Medical has become a market leader in organising medical conferences. What do you believe sets your approach apart in this specialised field?

We are a family business and that's what we think makes a difference, like many healthcare professionals, it's not just a job it's our business, when you call us, someone answers the phone – there's no phone menu or AI bot, just real people who are there to help.

Can you share some of the most significant changes you've observed in medical event management since you started Clockwork Medical?

30 years ago, confirmations and marketing were all done by post or fax! Presentations were on 35mm slides. The digital age has transformed the way things work, and the speed people expect responses is much faster.

How do you ensure that each event meets the educational needs of healthcare professionals while also engaging them effectively?

We work with the convenors, who decide on the clinical content of the meeting as they are the experts, often they want to squeeze as much content into a day as possible, we often advise that less is more- make more time for discussion. We always ask for feedback so we can improve and adapt the meeting to be the best possible experience for the delegate.



What strategies do you employ to keep up with the rapidly evolving medical technologies and incorporate them into your events?

We work closely with the convenors and sponsors of the meetings when the agenda is being set to ensure the latest innovations and relevant topics are included in the meeting, this can include new product zones, demonstrations and practical breakout sessions.

Collaboration is key in event planning. How does Clockwork Medical work with medical societies and professionals to curate relevant and impactful content?

From the initial idea, we involve medical societies and clinicians in developing the framework for the program, this includes the inclusion of valuable networking and sponsor breakout sessions into the program. The clinical content is obviously decided by the medical professionals. Being accredited by the Royal College of Surgeons of England is also a real benefit as we are able to seek advice on the key areas of interest.

Sponsorships are vital for event success. How do you balance sponsor interests with the educational integrity of your conferences?

This is often a delicate balance. Sponsors are fully aware that commercial presentations by their own sales / marketing staff don't work or create interest with the delegates, that's why when we have sponsored breakout sessions the topics are educational and are presented by clinicians who have data and outcomes to back up their presentations.



Can you discuss a particularly challenging event you've organised and how your team overcame the obstacles involved?

In 2024 We had a venue booked for a 3-day conference for 250 delegates.

Two weeks prior to the meeting we received an email saying the venue was no longer available but couldn't tell us why! Eventually we discovered it was chosen at the location for the leader's election debate on national TV, as the Prime Minister and opposition leaders were there, security meant no access to the building.

Fortunately, we worked with the venue and managed to agree access from 05:00hrs the morning of the event, stage sets had to be constructed, registration set up and exhibitor stands be completed by 08:00am – with careful planning and the goodwill of our partners we managed it!

Looking ahead, what trends do you foresee in medical conferences, and how is Clockwork Medical preparing to adapt to these changes?

More use of digital platforms / apps for delegates to access content, book places and refer to. We have just introduced a new free membership portal on our new website for health professionals where they can view recordings of meetings they have attended, download receipts and their CPD certificates. We are in the process of developing a new app to provide further engagement for both delegates and exhibitors.

For those aspiring to enter the field of medical event management, what advice would you offer based on your extensive experience?

Don't spend your day sat behind a keyboard, face to face communication where possible is key. Health professionals don't work a typical 9-5 day so you need to be prepared to work unusual hours, despite it's very rewarding working in an area that is dedicated to improving people lives and we are privileged to be a part of it.



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