

The BSoT buddy scheme at BAUS 2023: a new initiative for fostering international relationships



The BSoT committee at BAUS, many of whom were involved with the inaugural buddy scheme.

The buddy background

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The BAUS Section of Trainees (BSoT) 'buddies' scheme at BAUS 2023 was conceived as an idea by BAUS President, Jo Cresswell, in the planning stages of the meeting. The scheme was designed to pair BSoT members with international speakers with the aim of creating more opportunities for networking and mentorship. BSoT members would volunteer themselves to be paired with an international speaker where there would be a shared professional interest, whether that would be a particular subspecialty, procedure or broader occupational experience ensuring they would get the most out of the experience.

The idea was that the buddies would arrange to meet up before the session to introduce themselves and discuss their interests. They would stay together during the session and afterwards to chat about the presentations and network with other delegates. The co-benefits from this were that BSoT members would gain from the speakers' knowledge and experience, as well as the potential to create collaborative work and networking opportunities, as well as speakers having a point of contact in the conference to help them feel welcome and create a positive atmosphere.

Whilst this was a pilot scheme for BAUS 2023, we found that there was a very strong positive response between both the international speakers and trainees which fostered a lot of potential opportunities in the future such as research, observerships and fellowships (and I have even heard rumours that the BSoT Fun Run for The Urology Foundation may be replicated at EAU 2024!). We are learning from our experiences of this initial pilot scheme and hope for it to be repeated and grow at BAUS 2024.

My BSoT buddy scheme experience

By **Suzanne Dunk**,
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Embarrassingly, when the list of international speakers and leaders of overseas associations requiring a BSoT buddy was published, I must admit I did not recognise many of the names. This, combined with my lack of any foreign language skills requiring practise or shared heritage, and a good dose of imposter syndrome meant I did not immediately sign up for the scheme.

A couple of days later there were still available speakers to buddy with so I decided I should seize the opportunity. Professor Helen O'Connell stood out to me being one only two females on the list (maybe something else we should work on for next year's BAUS). She is the current President of the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand (USANZ) and Professor of Surgery at the University of Melbourne. I googled her and the very first thing that came up was her Wikipedia page, with the first sentence stating:

"Helen E O'Connell AO is an Australian professor of urology and a pioneer in the anatomical study of the clitoris."

I knew immediately that I wanted to meet her, impressed on three counts: her being famous enough to have her own Wikipedia page, having the Order of Australia honour and being a pioneer on the study of the clitoris.

In preparation to meet her I did some further research, listened to podcasts and TED talks of hers online and I did learn some new things on the anatomy and physiology of the clitoris and would recommend others to read / listen to her work.

We chose to meet for breakfast at her hotel on the first day of BAUS. She was staying at the Grand Hotel Birmingham which has

TRAINEES' FORUM

recently undergone an impressive refurbishment and the setting was beautiful. Unfortunately, I have to say the service was slow; the Australian Cricket Team were also staying there for the Ashes and presumably were keeping the chef busy ordering a ridiculous number of eggs or whatever cricketers eat for breakfast.

After all my research, by the time I met Professor O'Connell it was a bit like meeting a celebrity and I was slightly awestruck. Luckily, she was super friendly, down to earth and very easy to talk to. It was amazing to have this networking opportunity and get one on one time with someone so influential and successful. She was genuinely interested in my life, family and career and had great advice. We talked on a vast range of topics ranging from her fellowship in America to her daughter's upcoming gig at Glastonbury.

For me, the primary reason to be involved in the buddy scheme was to meet a mentor-like figure and be inspired toward doing greater things in urology. After the harsh slog of the FRCS exam over the last year I am now able to get my head out of the textbooks and guidelines that have been filling up my time, and I now want to consider involvement in more committees and projects, find my niche and be someone who progresses the world of urology rather than just practises it. But this requires a level of confidence and self-assurance that I struggle with. Professor O'Connell is certainly a good inspiration for this, having had success in so many areas and is therefore an ideal role model to look up to. As well as being an inspiration she was able to offer ideas for audits, projects and research.

For others, the aims of the meetings might involve making connections for an international fellowship. A trip to Australia is probably unlikely for me with a settled young family although I don't doubt that it would be amazing and if I wanted advice in this area, I'm sure she could easily have provided it.

After breakfast we walked over to the International Convention Centre together for the start of the BAUS Conference. I felt it was my

duty as her buddy to give back by making sure she didn't get lost on the way (I think she would have been OK!), ensuring she knew where the urological nightlife hot spots were and as a local West Midlands trainee I had at least a basic knowledge of Birmingham to point out a few sights along the way between her hotel and the conference centre.

Overall, this experience has given me something to aspire towards. Professor O'Connell is an amazing individual who has achieved a huge amount and if I can just replicate a small part of that maybe I can also achieve something great.



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