

PDR Discusses Progress And Celebrates 40 Years.

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The Pharma Documentation Ring held its 40th annual general meeting in Montpellier, France, September 30-October 2. The PDR is an industry association whose members represent the information departments of the leading R&D-based pharmaceutical corporations. The membership, which consists of 25 multinationals and which were all present at the meeting, accounts for around half the total global turnover (\$245 billion) of ethical drugs in 1997, ie 17 of the top 20 pharmaceutical firms were represented at the AGM. This year's meeting was organized by Sanofi Recherche.

To mark its 40th anniversary and the approaching millennium, three invited speakers gave their vision of different aspects of the pharmaceutical information scene in the 21st century. The speakers, Ian Tarr of the publication Current Drugs, J Prous of Prous Science and Sandra Ward of Glaxo Wellcome, discussed new technologies, together with the challenges and opportunities for both publishers and information service departments within the pharmaceutical industry.

Selected highlights from the presentations and ensuing discussions were:

- all 25 PDR companies now have well-established intranet-based services and the focus now is on optimizing the benefits from this important technology.
- extranets are increasingly being used as a way of obtaining secure access to large volumes of external information.
- PDR firms are continuing to migrate their CD-ROM applications to an intranet environment, to overcome the known problems associated with networking CD-ROMs. However, due to the non-availability of intranet-compatible versions of some major commercial sources or the high cost in individual cases, a number of companies are connecting CD-ROM applications directly to their intranets, thereby also overcoming the known networking problems.
- high year-on-year price increases for some paper-based journals continues to challenge PDR company budgets and a perceived need to exploit the electronic medium will inevitably lead to the cancellation of some paper-based subscriptions.
- there has been considerable growth in the number of scientific, technical and medical journals available in electronic form. Most PDR companies have already provided their R&D staff with access to some electronic journals. Further growth in this area is anticipated.
- the PDR will establish a joint PDR/ Publisher Forum with a small and selected group of publishers to develop a model draft licensing agreement for electronic journals.
- developments in proposed European Union copyright legislation and the introduction of further national licensing schemes continues to cause concern to some.