The judges made the following general comments, including the pitfalls encountered.

Photographic

What we are actually judging is the quality of the finished product - irrespective of what it took to achieve it. However in some cases the sheer quality of finished product, the degree of difficulty to achieve it, the unusual/rare take on the particular subject (in whatever clinical area) and the medical information/story it provides combine to produce a gold standard picture - even platinum.

Most of the submissions were a high standard - so it may take more than mere quality to raise your award - e.g some kind of combination of the qualities mentioned above. This year it was less easy to whittle out poor material as there was definitely less of it, which is good in that it showed the general standard is rising. It doesn't mean though that the top end had any more outstanding entries than have been seen in the past.

The comment that frequently passes during the judging relates to the appropriateness of entries. We often receive, particularly from students, material that has been done for some specific other purpose - an assignment for Staffs Uni or other course - and is submitted in the exact same form for the Awards. For example, a pair of pictures showing variations in lighting technique is a fairly common entry: Entrants would often do better to select the more impactful image and use it alone, and have a good think about how the picture will look in an exhibition.

In a similar vein, the PR stuff that is being submitted often shows good creative and technical ability, but is not always that impressive in an exhibition. For the more "media" based images taken of health professionals at work in hospitals we would advise photographers to think very carefully of how the image is considered as a "stand alone" removed from the context of the brochure/magazine in which they appear. How they appear in a publication can fit the context perfectly and be a stunning representation of what is required and meet the brief - but when removed from that context can seem stilted, posed and lacking depth. Then consider how they may appear in an exhibition! Much of entered material is done for websites, where the low resolution of the system hides a multitude of sins. Pictures may be used as no more than wallpaper, have text laid all over them, be cropped to any old shape and size (often very small) and Photoshopped to death and it's not a problem. It's a different matter putting such a picture up for scrutiny as an A4 print.

Captioning is a frequent source of disappointment. For most of the clinical work a simple diagnostic term is all that is required but all too frequently the descriptions provided are vague, uninformative and misspelt. Sadly this possibly reflects a basic lack of knowledge: the least you should do if submitting would be to look

up the condition illustrated before writing the caption. Also, not saying which way round a picture is supposed to be viewed is a common failing and it's surprising how many times it's not obvious!

How can entries be lifted to the next level of award? In many cases the application of fairly basic skills and attention to detail will do the trick, particularly at bronze-silver level. Perhaps something as simple as providing even borders around the actual image. Sharpness and particularly evidence of the control of depth of field is a big issue, as is the avoidance of "over processing" the image in Photoshop to produce a result that no longer looks "real". Lighting is obviously important and it is surprising how often we pick up on shots that have been lit "upside down" i.e. with light coming predominantly from below, surprising and disappointing actually, because this is a very fundamental photographic rule. Getting a silver up to gold requires more, obviously – at that level we are looking for evidence of complete mastery of the basics, a photograph of superb technical quality.

Video

Generally this year we saw better production standards in terms of the quality of filming as High Definition equipment is now standard. The high sensitivity of the cameras does mean that lighting is used less often, which speeds up production and reduces budgets but has to be used with care. Film making is a very complex combination of technical and creative skills and it's really tough to make sure that all the elements are of a high standard. In judging, therefore, we weren't looking for technical perfection but we were looking for effective communication. The better work was concise and used sound and moving pictures to bring things to the audience in a way which no other medium could achieve. Also, its important for film makers to think about the needs of the audience and this may not exactly be what the client thinks is best. Avoid amateur presenters reading from Autocues!!!

Entrants should look at three things.

1. Test the strength of the original idea - small and simple is always better.

2. Keep the aims and target audience in mind at all times during the production.

3. Give a lot more thought and effort to the sound design of the programme. This is where the information is carried.

Graphics

The standard of work was high and included more online work than in previous years with a number of new categories including iPad and mobile apps.

Because of the range of work – (it could be likened to comparing apples with pears, peaches and cherries) – from illustration to print to online – not every criterion could be applied to each entry e.g. there may not have been type used in an illustration, but an attempt was made to weight the work according to those criteria that fitted.

A bronze usually meant that an entry scored well in most categories, with some scoring less highly; a silver that it scored highly in most with perhaps one area where it was not at maximum and a gold that it scored exceptionally well in all applicable categories.

These were some of the considerations in the individual criteria applied

Was the content well handled?

Were the elements proportionate and reflecting a clear hierarchy of information?

Was there a consistent colour palette applied?

Were the colours appropriate to the target audience?

Were there problems of legibility or information hierarchy?

Did it have impact?

Was there evidence of a clear brief to the photographer / illustrator?

Were the typefaces chosen appropriate?

Was the type handled with discrimination?

Was it suitable for the message and audience conveyed?

Was there a consistent type hierarchy applied?

Did it have creative flair?

Was it out-of-the ordinary (in a good way)?

Was there a clearly understandable and compelling idea behind it?

Was it fit for purpose

Was the idea appropriate to the brief?

Was the target audience clearly addressed?

Was the medium chosen suitable?

I hope this will encourage all of you to have a go – you have to be in it to win it, and you never know, it could just be you this year!