



Airmail

National University of Singapore hosts successful conference

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The 1st Asia-Pacific Medical Education Conference (APMEC) was organised and hosted by the Medical Education Unit, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore. The conference was a great success, with more than 250 participants from nineteen countries attending.

WORKSHOPS

On the first day, several pre-conference workshops were conducted:

- On assessment,
- On the use of wireless Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) in medical education,

- On effective tutoring skills in PBL,
- On evidence-based medicine: what students should know, and
- On web-based medical education.

All the workshops were oversubscribed and many delegates had to be disappointed, a clear reflection of the keen interest in medical education among Asian medical educators.

MAIN CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The main conference included four plenary lectures, forty invited talks, twenty-two research papers and twenty-four posters. The invited talks and research papers addressed issues in curriculum development, PBL, overview of medical education in Asia, distance learning, web-based tech-



nologies for medical education, wireless and PDA applications in medical education, assessment and evidence-based medicine. Emerging trends in curriculum innovation, the pre-clinical/clinical divide and enhancing learning in the affective domain were examined and debated. There was a report on implementing a web-based system for PBL and one speaker posed the question whether there actually was a need for PBL in the clinical years.

PARALLEL SESSIONS

Two special parallel sessions were devoted to reviewing the status of medical education in Asia by representatives from various Asian medical schools, including a small survey on private medical schools in Asia. Preliminary results from the National University of Singapore, Medical Education Unit's project survey on the Profiles of Asian Medical Schools (PAMS) were also presented at these sessions.

PROJECTS, PORTFOLIOS AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Several experts shared their views on distance learning in the context of globalisation and internet-based education. Four projects:

- On virtual microscopy,
- On online role play and peer-review activity,
- On teaching haematopathology and diagnostic cytology with a virtual microscope, and
- On the use of electronic portfolios

were presented. The former editor of a medical education journal provided advice for authors when considering publication in a medical education journal. The role of basic science in medical student learning was also examined. A Singaporean doctor reported on the impact of SARS

(severe acute respiratory syndrome) on medical education. Several projects involving the use of PDAs and wireless networking were successfully completed and their results shared at the conference. A case on the use of portfolios in assessment and several methods of assessment of clinical skills, as well as implementation of evidence-based medicine in the medical curriculum, were reviewed. The conference ended with a plenary lecture on enhancing professionalism in medical education through faculty development programmes.

POSTERS AND ORAL ABSTRACTS

The poster and oral abstract sessions were of wide interest. The range of presenters included medical students and more senior faculty members. The best poster and oral presentations were given the NUS-Elsevier awards.

PLENARY SESSION

The plenary speakers were RM Harden, Suzanne S Stensaas, GR Norman and HT Aretz:

- Dr Harden shared his views on professionalism in teaching and best evidence medical education. He discussed several initiatives in best evidence medical education by international topic review groups that are undertaking systematic reviews of topics of interest to medical educators.
- Dr Stensaas convinced participants that medical education and technology could be successfully married. She gave examples of 'something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue' to ensure the success of the marriage.
- Dr Norman then obtained active audience participation with some interesting examples of the human ability to

rapidly and effectively classify everyday objects. His conclusion was that one important way to develop clinical reasoning is to expose the students to significantly more patients.

- Finally, Dr Aretz ended the conference on a high note by presenting models, programmes and metrics of professionalism in medical education in relation to clinical care and research, drawing attention to the fact that 'explicit goals of professionalism in medical education are only just emerging' and that 'faculty development is not just a moral obligation, but makes good business sense'.

The active participation of many international colleagues made the conference a real success. The talks were well received and there was a lot of enthusiasm generated in an informal and relaxed atmosphere. The low registration fee of US\$150, which included conference materials, daily teas, lunches and one conference dinner, was highly affordable to all in Asia, as evidenced by the overwhelming response. As a result, and regretfully, registration had to be closed a few weeks before the conference date. Feedback on the conference was excellent and many participants wrote to express their appreciation. Dr Mark Gelula of the University of Illinois wrote to say that it had been a

wonderful conference 'you and the folks' at the Medical Education Unit NUS created. I was really impressed with most of the keynote presentations as well as many of the oral presentations. Most were interesting and well thought out.

The organising committee is already planning for the 2nd APMEC Conference, to be held from 7th to 10th December 2004.

Feedback on the conference was excellent