POST CONFERENCE REPORT: JOINT CONFERENCE (AsMSA & IFMSA) 2011

HELD IN HONG KONG, SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Tim Hasted, University of Notre Dame Sydney MBBS III
Bronwyn Jones, University of Western Australia MBBS V
Kieran Longley, University of Tasmania MBBS III
Rachel Ng, University of New South Wales MBBS II
Aniruddha Sheth, University of Tasmania MBBS III
Amanda Wee, University of Tasmania MBBS III
Samuel Vo, University of New South Wales MBBS V

Introduction

The inaugural Joint Conference of the Asian Medical Students Association (AsMSA) and the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) was a huge success. Held in Hong Kong from the 25th of June to the 2nd of July, Joint Conference 2011 was attended by a large delegation of 30 Australian medical students interested in the conference’s theme – Integrative Medicine: Evidence-based, traditional, complementary and alternative medicine in modern medical practice.

AsMSA Hong Kong’s team of organisers created an amazingly diverse program that combined the strengths of the Asian Medical Students Conference with those of the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of the IFMSA. The academic and social programs allowed the 550 delegates from 32 countries to explore the conference theme from a variety of angles, while celebrating one another’s cultures and learning new skills in workshops and training sessions.
Academic Program

Lectures

There were two highly informative and thought provoking keynote lectures presented during the conference. These lectures addressed the theme of Integrative Medicine. The first lecture was presented by Professor Jin Ling Tang who explored the efficacy-driven approach to research in integrative medicine as well as the challenges to overcome in research in this field. The second lecture was delivered by Dr Vivian Wong, JP, who focused her lecture on the developments of integrative medicine in Hong Kong and around the world in regards to usage by members of the public and training of professionals.

There was a lecture series and interactive workshop presented to us by officials from the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDG). The lectures educated us on the UNMDGs and the current progress across the world, as well as what we could do as upcoming health professionals to contribute to their success. The interactive workshop presented two cases through which all of the delegates applied the basic principles of the UNMDGs to be able to understand their importance. Throughout the workshop, the Australian delegates gave significant input in identifying key issues and formulating solutions for them.

In addition, we also had Dr Craig Hassed from Monash University attend and discuss the ESSENCE of health, a model which promotes lifestyle changes by providing evidence to support the change, as well as assisting the patient in developing a holistic understanding of their health in the context of their current health. He also discussed mindfulness for
medical students as a stress management technique which culminated in a practical session to demonstrate the effectiveness of mindfulness.

Standing Committee Sessions
All of the delegates in the conference were split into five groups and each group attended one of the Standing Committee (SC) sessions, which were small group discussions. Attendees were introduced to the goals of the particular SC, facilitated to discuss how we could address such goals while collaborating with delegates from various countries and finally learning the method of creating successful projects. The standing committee sessions included Medical Education, Public Health, Research and Professional Exchange, Human Rights and Peace, and finally, Reproductive Health including AIDS.

AsMSA Booth/IFMSA Project Presentation
This activity allowed delegates from each country to learn about and understand the projects being conducted by medical students in their countries while learning about their culture. The Australian delegation taught the delegates from other countries about the native animals in Australia as well as discussing the Red Party.

Training workshop
Delegates attended a variety of training workshops designed to develop skills which would help with the implementation of projects formed in Standing Committee sessions and in their future career. The workshops, led by IFMSA trainers, addressed topics such as leadership development, communication skills, presentation skills, handover, negotiation, project management, time management, peer education and conflict resolution.

Academic Competitions
The Australian delegation submitted presentations for the academic paper, poster and video competitions. They were all designed to address aspects of traditional, alternative and complementary medicine in Australia’s health care system.

The scientific paper addressed the rising influence of traditional, alternative and complementary treatments among the Australian public by looking into the evidence and history behind hypnotherapy, a complementary medicine that is being rapidly adopted by medical professionals and health care consumers, as well as the history and potential of Traditional Australian Medicine, especially as an avenue for new medical research.
The academic poster addressed the issue of modernising indigenous medicine, specifically the issue of bringing traditional remedies from the bush into the modern era. The poster team achieved this by evoking powerful imagery conjoining the modern medical professional with the values, traditions and medicines of Traditional Australian Medicine.

The video team addressed the issues felt by the modern day health consumer, particularly addressing the issues of patient-professional interaction, sources of medical knowledge, and the issues surrounding complementary and alternative medicine. The video followed the journey of a fictional medical student, and their interaction with their GP, family, and encounters with alternative medicine. The Australian delegation placed first runner-up in this section of the academic competitions. All teams deserve congratulations for their hard work.

**Community Service**

The theme for the community service program was “Fall Prevention” targeting the elderly population. As part of the program, delegates were split into 2 groups with one group carrying out a home visit while the other participated in a training workshop. As part of the home visit, delegates were invited to the homes of elders, majority of whom were living alone. A detailed home assessment was carried out to assess fall and trip hazards and delegates were then able to interact with their elder via a translator and social worker from the Salvation Army, teaching them simple exercises to strengthen their muscles and educating them on fall prevention. The training workshop was carried out in the community hall with elders and delegates participating in a variety of presentations, games and activities, all with the aim of increasing awareness of the importance of fall prevention. Through these 2 programs, delegates were able to not only gain a better understanding of Hong Kong culture and other social aspects through direct interaction with Hong Kong locals, they were also able to help the elderly through simple activities.

**Site Visit**

An afternoon was dedicated to visiting various sites including the Hong Kong University Chinese Medicine Faculty and clinic, chiropractic, acupuncture and moxibustion workshop, in relation to the theme of traditional, complementary and alternative medicine. This gave delegates an opportunity to see and personally experience some of the traditional therapies that they had been introduced to over the week in lectures and workshops, in order to gain a better understanding of how they work. Brief introductions and demonstrations of the various therapies were given and discussions on how they are currently integrated into the conventional health system were also conducted.
Cultural Program

Throughout the Joint Conference, delegates were exposed to different aspects of Chinese culture. The conference was officially opened with a traditional lion dance performance accompanied with music of the beating of drums, cymbals and gongs.

On Day 5 of the conference, a Dinner and International Food and Drink party was held, where the Australian delegation set up a food stall which allowed delegates from other countries to sample food and snacks from Australia. While the Sao biscuits with Vegemite received mixed responses from those sampling them (being the first time for many), the definite favourite food item were the Tim Tams, which attracted plenty of delegates to the stall. Australian delegates were also given the opportunity to sample food from other countries’ stalls, which added to the experience of sharing cultures of not only Hong Kong, but also from all around the world.

On the final day of the conference, the Organising Committee arranged a cultural bazaar, in which delegates participated in small workshops that were aimed to share the culture of Hong Kong. These workshops included traditional knot-tying, paper cutting, calligraphy, learning traditional Chinese games and lessons in cooking Cantonese food, as well as a small workshop on basic kung-fu techniques.

The Cultural Night was planned for the last day of the conference, where each country participating in the conference went on stage with a cultural themed performance, such as traditional dancing and singing. The Australian delegation began their performance with a game of famous Australian icons/animals charades with the audience participating, which was followed by the delegates singing ‘I Still Call Australia Home’ and was finished with the Hawaii Five-0.

Social events

On day one of the conference all of the 500 delegates were divided into 30 groups, each of which was led by two or three group moderators (GMs) from AsMSA Hong Kong. From
there, the social program began in earnest with ice breaking in our respective groups, followed by a delicious welcoming dinner at the famous Star Seafood Floating Restaurant.

Over the next few days our groups were to become something akin to family, with social activities largely being centred around the wishes of each group’s members. Our GMs worked hard, into the early hours of the morning planning our activities, amidst arranging other things.

With regards to sightseeing and shopping, Hong Kong certainly did not disappoint; indeed many a lecture was missed as students were lured away by the prospect of happy times at Disneyland or making that essential purchase of “cheap ‘n’ fake” goods at the Mong Kok markets. Amongst the highlights of our sightseeing excursions were: taking a tram to “the Peak” to see Hong Kong’s night lights in all their glory; and viewing the magnificent city skyline from Victoria Harbour.

As ever, the Australian delegation lived up to its reputation of “hard-core party animals”, with delegates frequenting the various nightclubs and karaoke bars, without fail, every night - the famous, (or infamous) borough, of Lan Kwai Fong, being the destination of choice.

From a social perspective, the Joint Conference was a fantastic experience to delight even the most seasoned socialite, and one that will be remembered for many years to come.

Conclusion

All good things must come to an end and it was without a doubt an invaluable experience attending the inaugural Joint Conference of the Asian Medical Students Association and the International Federation of Medical Students Associations. A new culture was explored, more insight was gained into the field of integrated medicine and friendships were forged with memories that will last us a lifetime.