

Modern Medicine: To Share, To Educate, To Investigate

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2003 is a year no Singapore doctor or healthcare professional will ever forget.

In the first ever analysis of the world's healthcare systems, the World Health Organisation's World Health Report¹ ranked Singapore 6th among 191 health systems it had evaluated. Singapore was the only Asian country other than Japan to be ranked amongst the top 10 countries, and was ahead of both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Our handling of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis gave further credence to these results, and demonstrated to all that ours is a world-class healthcare system comprising trained and motivated doctors, nurses, administrators and allied health professionals.

Our small country has attained global stature in healthcare by continually investing in talent development. Until now, this meant identifying and grooming talent locally, sending staff overseas for further learning and skills development, and encouraging participation in continuing medical education programmes. In this new biotech century, this will not be enough to stay ahead: we need also to engender a climate of collaboration and research, a pivotal strategy for our survival in the increasingly competitive knowledge economy.

The National Healthcare Group (NHG) Annual Scientific Congress is a unique experience in that it is not a specialised scientific meeting, nor is it a 'doctors only' meeting, but a true *healthcare conference* aiming to integrate all aspects of healthcare delivery that ultimately reaches the individual patient. This is in keeping with the NHG motto of "patients first". With increasing participation from the region, it is likely that this congress will soon become the leading *healthcare conference* in Asia.

This year's Congress focuses on three activities: *to share, to educate, to investigate*. SARS made us realise that it is a small world after all, and that the best way for us to battle new diseases is to efficiently share information with healthcare workers globally. Some scientists have described SARS as only the dress rehearsal.² Thus, the SARS symposium represents not only a platform for us to share information on this disease today, but also the development of a forum for exchange of knowledge on future rapidly emerging illnesses. Multidisciplinary educational symposia that have been organised over the two conference days will update participants on the latest developments and newest ideas within their fields. Most importantly, research within NHG will be showcased in almost 400 poster and oral presentations. Together, this integrated approach of sharing the knowledge it acquires, continually educating and updating its healthcare workers, and encouraging a research climate to push the frontiers of medical science will secure Singapore's place as a leading healthcare hub, regionally and globally.

This year, the Congress has taken yet another bold step towards international recognition. For the first time in Singapore's medical history, abstracts and proceedings from a local medical conference will be immortalised in a peer-reviewed, indexed medical journal. The Congress Proceedings is published in this supplement issue of the *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore*. All abstracts were peer-reviewed, and of the 481 abstracts received 89 (18.5%) were rejected, a rate similar to top international conferences. Based upon merit, 33 participants were invited to submit extended abstracts. Of these, 20 were selected to compete for the Young Investigator Award and Best Oral Presentation Awards, and the remainder will be presented as Special Posters. This rigorous peer-review system has ensured that only high-quality scientific content will be presented at the Congress, and that every oral presentation will be of international standing.

Despite difficult times, the Congress has proceeded as planned. This would not have been possible without the excellent efforts of all Singapore healthcare workers in battling SARS, the faith and perseverance of the entire organising committee, the enthusiastic participation and timely submissions by over 500 educators and investigators, the support of the senior management of NHG, and you the participants. The Organising Committee hopes you enjoy reading these congress proceedings as much as we have enjoyed putting them together for you, and most of all that you have an enlightening and rewarding conference.

REFERENCES

1. The World Health Report 2000, World Health Organisation, 2000.
2. Haydon D, Judson O. Face masks, deserted airports, quarantines, school closures, cancelled conferences and holidays - has it all been a hysterical over-reaction? No: it has been worse. It has been a grave under-reaction. Financial Times, May 8 2003.

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