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Conference Report

**13th World Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine, Melbourne,
6-10th May, 2003**

Frank Archer

The 13th World Congress of the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine was held in Melbourne in the first week of May 2003. This was only the second time that the World Association had held its World Congress in the southern hemisphere, and the first time it had been held in Australia.

The host organisations for this World Congress included:

- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- Australian Defence Forces
- Australian Disaster Medicine Group
- Convention of Ambulance Authorities
- McFarlane Burnet Centre for Medical Research and Public Health - International Health Unit
- Monash University Centre for Ambulance & Paramedic Studies

Planning for this Congress commenced 4 years ago when the Melbourne bid was successfully presented at the 11th World Congress in Osaka, Japan. The program was enhanced with input from the 12th World Congress in Lyon, France, two years ago, and also the 6th Asia Pacific Conference on Disaster Medicine held in Fukuoka, Japan in 2002.

The over-arching Congress theme was to, “redefine the scope of disaster and emergency medicine to help shape the vision for the health response to emergencies over the next 20 years”.

The Congress program included three days of pre-Congress workshops, followed by three days of the Congress proper and attracted over 500 delegates. Over 300 scientific papers were presented at this Congress, which included papers from 35 invited international speakers with participation from 32 countries.

The Congress scientific program was built around the five Standing Committees and the 11 Task Forces of WADEM namely:

Committees:

WADEM Board
Education Committee
Research Committee
Publications Committee
Paediatric Committee

Task Forces:

Disaster Planning
Co-ordination and Control
Civilian-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)
(Disaster) Public Health
Psychosocial Aspects of Disasters
Refugees/Displaced Person
Medical Response to Terrorism
NBC Hazards
Emerging Infections
Transportation Incidents
Landmines

The Congress opening session included the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Senator Kay Patterson, State Minister for Health and Community Services, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, and a welcome from an Elder of the Winjerri People, Ms Joy Murphy-Wandin. The Congress was officially opened by the President of WADEM, Dr Knut Sundnes of Norway.

A program reflecting the principle theme and built around the Committees and Task Forces saw committees meeting from 7.00am with plenary sessions on the first 2 days of the Congress, followed by 5 concurrent sessions throughout the remainder of the Congress.

In addition to the task force themes, there were also discipline sessions providing a rare opportunity for international forums for nurses, the health social sciences, and Paramedics, including a highlight on research activities.

One of the highlights of the Congress was the announcement of the inaugural Peter Safar Award for Services to Disaster Reanimatology which was awarded to Professor Marvin Birnbaum, the long-standing editor of WADEM's journal, Prehospital and Disaster Medicine. This award honours the life time contribution of Prof. Peter Safar, who not only made long standing and major contributions in resuscitation science, but was also heavily involved as a key leader in the development of prehospital care in the United States, and in disaster medicine internationally. Prof. Safar was also a founder member of the Club of Mainz which was the forerunner to WADEM.

Two other highlights included a resolution to form an Oceania Association of Disaster and Emergency Medicine which will be a multi-disciplinary professional interest group, reflecting the interests of those involved in this area of health care, and will be the regional affiliate for WADEM. The Congress culminated with the endorsement of a Melbourne Statement which broadens the current concepts of disaster and emergency medicine to include a reflection in multi-disciplinary emergency health.

Another feature throughout the Congress was the very strong health social sciences theme reinforcing the multi-disciplinary nature of the health response to disasters.

Each of the WADEM Committees and Task Forces now have an appointed Chair/Co-Chair, an international membership and a direction to guide their activities over the next 2 years, before preparing reports and recommendations to the next World Congress to be held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in May, 2005.

Post-Congress evaluation suggested that the Congress objectives had been met, that the scientific program was rich, sound, and stimulating, and that the Congress had made a major contribution towards the international development of the health response to emergencies and disasters.

The World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine is the international pre-eminent professional body representing the multi-disciplinary interests of organisations and individuals contributing to the health response to disasters and membership is encouraged from the broadest multi-disciplinary base. Further information can be found on WADEM's web site, <http://wadem.medicine.wisc.edu>.

Membership of WADEM is commended for those interested in this area of health care. You should mark 10 - 27th May, 2005 in your diaries for what would be a very pleasant and profitable trip to Edinburgh.

Frank Archer
Chair
Local Organising Committee
WCDEM-13

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