

2012

Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP) Annual Conference 2009

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CONFERENCE REVIEW

Australian College of Ambulance Professionals Annual Conference 2009
SKYCITY Convention Centre, Auckland, New Zealand. 16 – 17 October 2009

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This was the first ACAP conference to be held outside of Australia. The conference was held over two days with a pre-conference workshop on 15th of October. The workshop was presented by Monash University with the title: *Understanding the Challenges of Emerging Health Threats in Oceania*.

Workshop Synopsis

This pre-conference workshop introduced delegates to the challenges of managing emerging health threats in the Oceania region, specifically:

- A discussion of international emerging health threats, with particular relevance to Oceania, with a focus on public health emergencies and infectious diseases
- An introduction to the concept of "Global Health Security"
- Case studies of the Victorian bush fires and the heatwave of early 2009.
- A discussion of the evolving roles of Emergency Health Operation Centres (EHOCs)
- An overview of the future challenges resulting from these emerging health threats

Speakers included:

- Professor Frederick "Skip" Burkle Jr
- Mr Steve Brazier
- Professor Frank Archer
- Mr John Coleman
- Mr Paul Holman
- Mr Graeme McColl
- Miss Erin Smith

The conference attracted over 350 delegates, mostly from Australia and New Zealand with keynote speakers from the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia and New Zealand. These speakers discussed a wide range of topics that impact on the delivery of pre and out of hospital care across the globe.

Over the course of the two day conference, a total of thirty six concurrent sessions covered the following areas of interest:

- Trauma, Pain, Clinical
- Workforce / Stroke
- Resuscitation /Airway
- Education

One of the concurrent sessions on the Friday was for the students to present their work and showcase the next generation of paramedic. The topics discussed by the students were:

- Fire-fighter first responders attending cardiac arrests: A review of the ECG data
- Pain measurement and alleviation
- The accuracy of undergraduate paramedic students in taking a blood pressure - A pilot study
- How do paramedic syringe medication errors occur and what solutions are available?
- The feasibility of establishing emergency care practitioners in New Zealand
- When pressure is positive: a literature review of the pre-hospital use of continuous positive airway pressure.

The other concurrent session showed similar diversity with many original research papers being delivered. Also at the conference were nineteen posters covering:

- Education
- Pain studies
- Airway management
- Professionalism
- First responder programs

These posters were prepared by students and educators from universities and ambulance services in Australia and New Zealand. The poster finalists were of a very high standard, giving the judges of the best poster competition a significant challenge when it came to selecting the winning poster.

Once again one of the underlying themes at the conference was the registration of ambulance professionals across Australia and New Zealand. Professor Joseph Epstein discussed the activities of ACAP on the issue of registration and the current state of play following the Australian federal government move towards a national registration scheme for health care professionals. This opened up an opportunity for a number of currently unregistered health care professionals to attain registration for the first time. However, paramedics were not included in the first phase. A second group of health care professionals, all of whom are currently unregistered, will have the opportunity to attain registration in 2012. At this time, paramedics are not on the list to be considered in this second phase.

With registration, paramedics will have the opportunity to practice their craft outside of the state run ambulance authorities, and paramedics will be empowered to take control over the direction of paramedicine in Australia. This issue of control may be one of the reasons that registration has met with resistance from both state governments and the ambulance authorities, thus far.

If paramedics are not successful in attaining registration in the second phase of the national registration scheme, it is unlikely that they will achieve this milestone for some time after 2012 (if at all). However, in an important development on this issue, the government of New Zealand is currently considering registration of paramedics in a favourable light. If the decision is made to register paramedics in New Zealand, this may place pressure on the Australian government to consider similar action; given that agreements exist between New Zealand and Australia in relation to maintaining consistency of standards in a number of issues, including public health and the recognition of educational and professional standards.

At the annual general meeting of ACAP which was conducted on the Thursday prior to the conference, there was a move to consider expanding ACAP into New Zealand as a regional college extending beyond the borders of Australia. This proposal was generally accepted by the members and the committee is now looking at the feasibility of the move and its implications on the college and its members.

As this was the first annual ACAP conference conducted outside of Australia, it was a great success with strong representation from both Australia and New Zealand. The eclectic nature of paramedicine was very evident in the breadth, depth and quality of the presentations at the conference, and bodes favourably for the future of the college and its conferences in the future. Next year's conference will be held in Perth, Western Australia in October.