

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

WMA GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

This year, the World Medical Association (WMA) General Assembly was held in Chicago, home of the American Medical Association (AMA), from 11 to 14 October 2017. The Assembly was held at Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel, which was within walking distance from the AMA Plaza. During the assembly, we witnessed the handing over of the WMA presidency from Dr Ketan Desai, Indian Medical Association, to Dr Yoshitake Yokokura, Japan Medical Association, the current president of the Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania.

Out of 111 member nations, only 49 were present this time. Many issues were discussed at the Assembly; the most prominent was that of doctors in several African nations having to work under adverse working environments due to their governments' interpretation of the Declaration of Geneva. Dr Otmar Kloiber, WMA secretary general, offered that the WMA would clarify with the respective governments of the various member countries upon request. Additionally, four countries were admitted to the WMA in this session: Belarus, Belize, Czech Republic and Pakistan.

The theme for the Scientific Session of the WMA conference this year was "Assuring Quality in Undergraduate Medical Education", with many renowned speakers in attendance. Dr John Norcini spoke on global medical school expansion, where he compared the growth of the number of medical schools per region and per population, and highlighted that many places with rapid growth in the past few years have yet to reach the per population target. However, the confounding factor in the study is that the size of the classes remained unknown. Prof David Gordon, president of World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), spoke next on the creation of accreditation and quality systems to evaluate various medical education programmes

throughout the world. He shared that although the frameworks of medical education in the US and China are different, they are both found to be of very high standards and WFME is extremely pleased with the results.

The next presenter was Dr Humayun Chaudhry, chair of the International Association of Medical Regulatory Authorities (IAMRA). He spoke of the structure and functions of IAMRA in regulating their accreditation systems, before touching on new models of medical education. Dr George C Mejicano delivered a lecture on competency-based medical education and discussed the new domains of competencies. On top of patient care, procedural skills and medical knowledge, competencies now include practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and system-based practice and evaluation by trustable professional activities. Dr Roger Strasser, dean of Northern Ontario School of Medicine, spoke on longitudinal learning in community settings. He proposed that medical education should allow students to engage the community so as to train doctors to address community health concerns and not just the complex problems seen in the teaching hospitals. The final speaker was Prof Ducksun Ahn, vice president of WFME, who spoke on professionalism.

On the last day of the conference, Dr Anthony S Fauci spoke on the topic "Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases: From AIDS to Zika", during which he described how major epidemics appear with each new US presidency and how he convinced the US president to support his measures, from increasing the speed of production of vaccines upon encountering a new disease to adopting workable traditional ways of preventive measures to control the spread of diseases without having to synthesise the vaccines (eg, SARS).

Attending the WMA conference helped SMA gain knowledge not only from its plenary lectures but also from the sharing of issues that arose in different member countries, which may help us better manage similar problems if we were to encounter them in the future. ♦



Legend

1. Dr Ardis D Hoven (chairperson of Council, WMA) presenting the Presidential Medal to incoming President, Dr Yoshitake Yokokura from Japan
2. Dr Lee Yik Voon with delegates from Belize Medical and Dental Association

Dr Lee is a GP practising in Macpherson. He is a pet lover at heart who is the proud owner of a dog, and regularly feeds neighbourhood community cats. He also enjoys playing online war games and thinks that playing Pokemon Go is a good form of exercise.

