

EVENT NAME:	15th National Conference of the Australian College of Operating Room Nurses (ACORN)
DATE:	23 - 26 May 2012
TOTAL ATTENDANCE:	700 Delegates
EVENT ORGANISER:	Vicky Warwick - ACORN President Wayne Taylor, Taylored Images - Conference Manager

BACKGROUND:

The role of ACORN is to support the professional growth and development of Perioperative Nursing in Australia. As well as educational facilitation and an accreditation program for its members, the College ensures members are informed on issues of significance and also provides consultation and advice to national and state governments and other authorities on Perioperative nursing and related health issues. ACORN produces a series of journals and has documented standards for all Perioperative Nurses in Australia.

EVENT OBJECTIVE:

Budget management, members networking and successful information sharing and education, as well as enjoying time away from the workplace were all objectives for the ACORN organising committee for the Bi Annual National Conference.

In 2010, at the invitation of the then national president Cheryl Winter, a strong supporter and resident of the Northern Territory of Australia for forty years, it was decided to host the 2012 conference in Darwin. The new Darwin Convention Centre had recently opened and through Cheryl's research into its attractive event facilities, and an attractive package including support from the Darwin Convention and Visitors Bureau, the committee were convinced to proceed. There were some initial concerns regarding costs due to location, but the committee decided that ACORN should rotate around each State and Territory to support its member's wishes, and that potential budget variations could be managed.

In recognising the many boundaries in the health care system that govern Perioperative Nursing from laws and regulations to cultural and spiritual, the theme for 2012, "Territorial Boundaries - Dare to be Diverse" was chosen to provide a platform to deliberate and showcase solutions for the many challenges facing the organisation and its members. The theme also supported the development of a strong program to stimulate and increase member's knowledge.

The committee and conference organisers also set themselves objectives to go beyond finding out about clinical news. They wanted to ensure that there were opportunities for networking with nurses from varied practice settings to share stories and insights, and to enjoy their time away from workplace. Participants were called upon by the then President of ACORN, Vicky Warwick, to "celebrate what is great about the practice".

New initiatives were also on the agenda and the task of ensuring continued support from sponsors was also a key objective.

EVENT FORMAT:

The comprehensive program included pre conference workshops, an Annual General Meeting with an open forum, and a special Oration and investiture of Fellows. The main program held over three days included a range of keynote addresses, multiple concurrent sessions, Master Classes and special interest sessions each day. Poster presentations and an exhibition are also held daily and a range of social networking occasions including a welcome reception, breakfasts, lunches and breaks as well as the conference Gala Dinner and pre and post destination touring.

In setting the theme of the conference "Territorial Boundaries - Dare to be Diverse" the committee set the challenge for participants and speakers to assist in the development of a diverse program. This challenge turned into a catalyst that helped uncover many topics of great relevance which also found great traction and many ideas with the

destination and the challenges faced by local nurses caring for remote and isolated communities and special indigenous healthcare issues.

The call for papers included a wide scope of the boundaries challenging perioperative nurses. “Boundaries” could be considered as the care for patients from outside of Australia, visitors, refugees, or professional boundaries to challenge the traditions, or geographic boundaries such as the tyranny of distance and associated costs or response services.

Along with many important speakers covering the many surgical and nursing issues, clinical product development and laser technology, choosing speakers to go beyond the traditional areas turned out to achieve a very positive response from the audience. Motivational speakers included Brennon Dowrick, an Australian successful gymnast who participated and won medals at the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games and the World Championships. He provided participants with inspiration and encouragement on how to achieve and keep achieving, having participated in major events over a decade. Training on lateral thinking by Graeme Bowman was also an innovative addition to the program and welcomed by many who have to think differently in much pressured situations.

A visit and presentation at the Royal Darwin Hospital, where fellow members shared their challenges on the local situation truly showed how “Territorians” managed to push their boundaries. The Northern Territory through its remote location within Australia, and its proximity to many other countries attracts challenging regional and international situations.

A surprise inspirational speaker was chosen to close the proceedings. Sam Cawthorn, 2009 Young Australian of the year, and CEO of Empowering Enterprises, recounted how he defied all odds by walking again after a major car accident where he was pronounced dead, resuscitated but with an amputated right arm and permanent disability in right leg and how he has now pushed his own boundaries to success. His situation and determination was familiar to many who care for patients in their daily work and so close to heart that it moved many of the audience.

To support an already successful program, the introduction of a new initiative to have a Master class section was considered a highlight. It changed the way ACORN offers educational opportunities, and provided an opportunity for participants to be more hands-on at clinical teaching sessions. Set up in the Health and Education Partners Precinct, it extends the time that nurses are able to get clinical and product knowledge. There were eight educational areas conducted during the exhibition opening times and were also extended to whenever there was a concurrent session. Classes included a range of educational topics such as wound closure, infection prevention, innovation in obstetrics and surgical blood management, electro-surgery, patient positioning and areas to support nurses themselves such as safety and protection, stress management and healthcare associated infections. These Classes offered additional opportunities for attendees to obtain more continuing professional development hours necessary for nurses to achieve mandatory twenty hours per year. Twenty delegates per class allowed for interaction and learning.

A surprisingly successful outcome for the committee was also achieved by a well balanced conference budget and in fact a small profit to contribute to the ongoing conference management and important education programs. The concern for a lower level of support by delegates and supporters was dismissed by the overall attendance.

THE DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE EXPERIENCE:

ACORN has traditionally held their conference in hotel style venues, however Wayne Taylor and his convention team were delighted with the response from the committee and delegates alike at the outcome of his support to use a purpose built and managed venue such as the Darwin convention Centre. “Ultra-positive” was how he described the general response. “The team at the Darwin Centre are very professional and congenial – they are ready to assist with whatever we wanted or needed” he advised. “The difference with staff at the convention centre is that they are dedicated to our event, and have professional event organisers who understand our needs. Useful facilities such as dedicated organisers offices and business equipment made our life so much easier”. “Under the direction of Malu Barrios, the General Manager, we were also delighted with the quality and quantity of food.” Some initial concerns regarding the distance for our exhibitors but this was not an issue and we were delighted with the support we received this year from our sponsors and exhibitors. “The design, layout and access to the centre supported all our supporters” said Wayne.

Cheryl Winter was also delighted that Darwin proved to be a success for ACORN's members and committee. She is very confident in the city's infrastructure and remains a strong supporter. "I highly recommend the Darwin and the Darwin Convention Centre to other organisations" said Cheryl. "The large rooms, the stunning location and walking distance to the centre of the city and the high level of professionalism of the management team make me proud to be a Territorian", she said.

NORTHER TERRITORY EXPERIENCE:

With a very business and scientific focussed program, there was little room for leisure activities, however those delegates who found some time did stay on to enjoy the region's spectacular areas and parks. Those who did not get the chance enjoyed local opportunities provided through the program in Darwin such as Mindil Beach Sunset Markets, the fantastic reception location of the centre on the harbour and not least of all the Gala dinner. "The Gala dinner was spectacular under the stars and was a night to remember" according to Wayne. He was also delighted with the local talent he discovered in the night's theme of Pricilla, Queen of the Desert. He advised that guests said that it was the "most successful dinner they ever had at their annual conference". It was a very entertaining evening by all accounts.

Cheryl Winter is confident that the combination of the attraction of the NT as an exciting tourist destination and an interesting regional program brought the support to ensure the successful attendance.

NORTHER TERRITORY EXPERIENCE:

ACORN'S biggest annual event was a success with 700 delegates and very positive support for the program, the venue and the destination. It was one of our most successful conferences to date and Darwin proved its capacity to service an important scientific and educational conference.

QUOTES:

"Flights were very affordable"

"The Darwin team delivered on our standards and our clients standards"

Wayne Taylor, Conference Orgnaiser

"The food was excellent."

"The flexibility of the meeting rooms and the professionalism of the AV team was very impressive."

Cheryl Winter, Past President

For further information or comment, please contact:

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