

CASE STUDY



- Event:** Joint Meeting of the 8th Biennial Scientific Meeting of the Asia Pacific Paediatric Endocrine Society, APPES, and the 33rd Australasian Paediatric Endocrine Group, APEG, Annual Scientific Meeting, 2014
- Date:** 28 October – 1 November 2014
- Attendance:** 532 Delegates (180 Australian, 352 International)
- Organiser:** Lyndell Wills, Director, Will Organise

Background

The Asia Pacific Paediatric Endocrine Society (APPES) and The Australasian Paediatric Endocrine Group (APEG) provide a professional forum for those interested in Paediatric Endocrinology throughout the Region. Both organisations provide education and information about paediatric endocrine disorders and diabetes to health providers, and promote the best standards of care for young people with related disorders. In addition APEG promotes related research and is the official body representing paediatric endocrinologists in Australia and New Zealand. APPES has members in 14 countries throughout the Asia Pacific Region

Event objective

Being the first joint meeting, the main aims for both organisations were; to achieve and share with colleagues the best representation of work from throughout the region, and to provide a world class educational forum for all delegates. In recognition of the possible challenges for a first joint meeting, it was agreed that the financial target should result in a break-even budget, a 'no loss' target.

Event format

The conference program held over 4 days included:

- Council meetings and AGMs for both organisations
- Two special pre-event symposia
- Opening ceremony including awards presentations
- Opening plenary with keynote address, three additional plenary sessions plus four parallel sessions
- Five oral and poster sessions, six symposia and five practical sessions
- Trade displays and a final closing session
- Welcome reception, daily lunch, conference dinner and an accompany persons program

Outcomes

It was a “hit” said Ms. Wills, “everything just came together”, she claimed modestly. “When the President of APEG, Prof Fergus Cameron, in his closing speech suggested that, “we should do this more often”, and that he was “really impressed”, I knew we had achieved our main goal”, she said.

The work of the joint scientific committee was congratulated by the President when he announced that, “there was great science at this meeting”. The committee attracted prominent key note speakers including the President and President elect of the International Society of Paediatric and Adolescent Diabetes and 238 scientific presentations and papers. The addition of a 2 day practical stream strengthened the program and expanded the base of delegates attracting an additional 96 allied health professionals such as educators, nurses, social workers, dietitians and general paediatricians.

“There was just a wonderful cohesive atmosphere throughout the meeting”, said Ms. Wills, and in supporting this described one delegate’s view of the final closing session as having “lots of love in the room, everyone is happy!”

Evidence of success can be viewed through the numbers too, with the meeting achieving 532 delegates. “This was a great outcome”, said Ms Wills, “as ideally we hoped for between 400-600 delegates”. It took extra determination and resources to achieve sponsorship with the complications of a combined meeting, and also the effects of the GFC impacting on the closure of many regional offices of major pharmaceutical companies. This resulted in Ms. Wills having to negotiate with many more individual country representatives. But they got their results in the end and a budget that balanced.

Many of the challenges posed by delegates arriving from over 23 countries were overcome by the warm welcome they received in Darwin. Language barriers were addressed for speakers in particular by providing ‘buddies’ to assist in their local exploration of Darwin’s attractions.

The Darwin Convention Centre Experience

The original decision to bid to host this prestigious meeting in Darwin was influenced by the Darwin Convention Centre. The team at the Centre proved their professionalism and experience as “we could not find fault in their delivery”, said Ms. Wills. “Even when we had to change our dates, they were flexible and helpful and we appreciated their support. Their team were committed to the event. They were eager, very responsive, attentive, and we were never disappointed in our decision”, she said.

The Northern Territory Experience

The choice of Darwin had great advantages for the meeting. In particular in terms of acceptance, “it was evident our culturally diverse contingent felt at ease at a time that coincided with the rise of new terrorism concerns”, shared Ms. Wills. “Darwin with its already broad cultural mix of 50 different nationalities created a naturally hospitable atmosphere”.

“I have always loved managing conferences in Darwin,” said Ms. Wills. “It is an exciting place for both Australian and international delegates, plus the weather was just great. Where else could you achieve such a welcoming ice-breaker of a session but at a cocktail party with real crocodiles? The opportunity to swim with crocodiles at Crocosaurus Cove had all our delegates talking to each other in seconds!” she said.

Delegates had free shuttles to the ever popular Mindil Beach Markets and a tour operator was available on site throughout the conference to arrange post tours around Darwin and the 'Top End'.

Challenges and Triumphs

In addressing the aims of building a program to satisfy both organisations, a joint scientific program committee was given the task of developing an exciting scientific program including sourcing speakers to cover relevant topics and the latest developments and research available.

The challenge of managing the budget and event operating logistics, as well as facilitating the needs of both organisations became the role of an experienced organiser and director of event management company, Will Organise, Ms. Lyndell Wills.

Ms. Wills and her team were familiar with both organisations having already managed the APEG secretariat and meetings for 10 years. Ms. Wills had also led the bid to host the joint meeting in Australia involving attending APPEP meetings in China and Indonesia. As a result, Ms. Wills also recognised and began planning for challenges posed by the needs of hosting participants from so many different countries, including travel, language, and their cultural diversity.

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