

World Health Professions Regulation Conference 2014

Text by Dr Daniel Lee
Photos by World Medical Association



Healthcare professionals from more than 52 countries attended the conference

THE THIRD World Health Professions Regulation Conference was held from 17 to 18 May 2014 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Geneva. Organised by World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA), the two-day event was attended by healthcare professionals from more than 52 countries. The conference focused on three major areas in health professional regulation – challenges facing health professional regulation; lessons from the evolution of competence-based approaches to regulatory functions; and contrasting regulatory models to promote best practices in regulatory governance and performance. The issues discussed at the conference are summarised below.

Challenges facing health professional regulation

In recent years, there have been heightened calls for greater effectiveness and accountability in professional regulation, in light of high profile cases of professional misconduct. Globally, the regulatory context is increasingly

impacted by global trends such as the growing number of trade agreements, the push for greater harmonisation and ease of mobility, economic pressures, corporatisation of healthservices, and human resource challenges in healthcare. These factors signal a growing need for regulation to address issues regarding harmonisation of qualifications and legal responsibility across national borders.

Ms Annabel Seebohm, Head Legal Advisor of the World Medical Association, highlighted recent developments in professional regulation in relation to the European internal market. She also discussed the impact of standardisation initiatives in Europe and global lessons for health professional regulation.

Lessons from the evolution of competence-based approaches to regulatory functions

Competence-based approaches to health professional learning and assessment, including the evaluation of



Participants took to the mike with their questions at the open dialogue session



World Medical Association President Dr Margaret Mungherera speaking about health practitioner regulation in Africa

continuing competence to practice, have evolved in response to challenges to healthcare delivery. In some countries, competence-based training and assessment provide a potential solution to health workforce shortages by supporting greater medical manpower flexibility, and reducing the cost and time of educating health professionals.

Prof Rhona Flin, Chair in Applied Psychology and Director of Industrial Psychology Research at the University of Aberdeen, spoke about the importance of equipping practitioners handling safety-critical tasks involving significant risks, time pressure and complex technology with both technical and non-technical skills. The latter skill set includes situation awareness, decision making, leadership and stress management, among others. In healthcare, methods of training and rating of non-technical skills for surgeons, anaesthetists, emergency physicians and scrub nurses are already available. Prof Flin further discussed the practical and professional issues of assessing these skills in health professionals.

Best practices in regulatory governance and performance

Regulatory bodies need to employ best practices in both operational and strategic governance, in order to ensure effective performance of their functions and compliance with all obligations. Systems and practices supporting good regulatory governance may change over time as policy and external environments evolve. Therefore, regulatory bodies have an ongoing obligation to monitor and review their regulatory frameworks, systems and practices to ensure that they remain relevant to the current healthcare environment.

Mr Niall Dickson, Chief Executive and Registrar of the General Medical Council in the UK, explained how British medical professional regulation has evolved over the last ten to 15 years, from self-regulation to an independent model of regulation that is free of government intervention and directly accountable to Parliament.

Throughout the conference, global health leaders had ample opportunities to discuss the latest developments in health professional regulation. These stimulating discussions have provided much insight on how these pertinent developments occurring internationally can relate to the current regulatory milieu in Singapore. ■



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