

# **POST CONFERENCE REPORT: ASIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS' CONFERENCE (AMSC) 2012**

*Held in Manila, Philippines.*

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## **Introduction**

The 33<sup>rd</sup> Asian Medical Students' Conference (AMSC) was held from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of July accommodating over 300 individuals from over 16 different countries. This was organized and hosted by Asian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) – Philippines. Australia sent 29 medical students, of which 6 were from the University of Tasmania (UTAS). The theme for this conference was "Surmounting Health Inequalities Across Asia as One Region."



*photo by Nicholas Voon*

## **Academic Program**

As part of the Academic Program there were some informative and thought provoking keynote lectures presented by renowned figures in the Filipino society including Dr Julieta Gabiola who is one of the clinical associate professor at Stanford University. These series of lectures covered a broad range of topics including population growth and urbanization, universal health care and poverty.

In addition to the keynote lectures, there were also Small Group Discussions where medical students from all over the globe put their heads together to discuss the health issues in their own country. This facilitated healthy discussions regarding what are the current strategies and also how we can contribute as future health professionals.

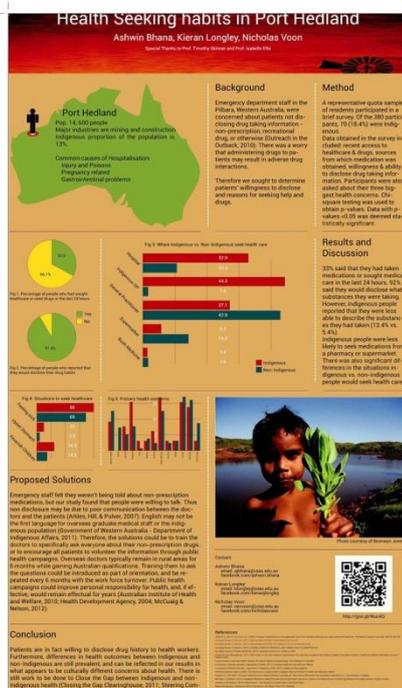
Several academic workshops were also organized including Paediatric Rheumatology, Biomedical Photography, Biochemistry of Love, Poetry Therapy, Public Speaking and many others. These interactive sessions allowed delegates to broaden their interest and knowledge in different aspects of medicine.

## Academic Competitions

There were three academic competitions at this year’s AMSC, with the overall theme of “Surmounting Health Inequalities across Asia as One Region.” The competitions included the scientific paper competition, the scientific poster competition, and the health campaign, which included the public poster, photography and film competitions.

Australia’s entries addressed the theme through a variety of topic areas: The scientific paper looked at HIV-infection in Men who have sex with Men in the Australian Population; the scientific poster presented the health seeking habits in Port Hedland, with a focus on indigenous v. non-indigenous habits; and the public poster addressed the issues of discrimination and prejudice. Australia’s film entry addressed the large disparity between the health outcomes of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Australia was incredibly successful at this year’s competitions, winning first place in the scientific paper and poster, and came in equal first in the public poster competition. Australia also placed third in the public film competition.



Left to Right – Research Poster (1<sup>st</sup> Place), Public Poster 1 (Two Sides One People – 1<sup>st</sup> Place) & Public Poster 2 (Bridge the Difference)

## **Community Service & Site Visit**

In line with the theme of Health Disparity students were given the opportunity to visit Kaunlaran village – an area of lower socioeconomic status in the outskirts of Manila. Local students of the University of Santo Tomas are required to do a 1 month community placement here. In this village they conduct free health consultations and promote primary healthcare to the local schools. Delegates were given a tour of the schools and were allowed to get involved with activities such as Hand-hygiene promotion, Blood-typing and the Malnutrition programme.

The remaining part of the day involved a tour around one of the local hospitals. Interesting to note was the disparity between the public and private hospitals. Students who visited the Philippine General Hospital described a poorly maintained and under resourced health institution. Wards consisted of lobbies with beds lined along each side with minimal separation. There were no isolation rooms and the risk of infection spread was very high.

This was in contrast to the private hospitals – which had state-of-the-art facilities and plenty of subspecialties, such as Dance-injury Orthopaedics! Some of these facilities would surpass those seen at private Australian hospitals. One private hospital included presidential suites – a top floor patient room which felt more like a hotel, with Panoramic views, a lounge room, dining room and spa! Hospitals such as the Makati Medical Centre have made the Filipino government begin to promote medical tourism to the country, an industry currently popular in India and Thailand.



*Left – Children from the village playing with buckets in the garden. - photo by Nicholas Voon*

*Middle - A coke bottle passes as a sharps container at Philippine General Hospital. - photo by Ashwin Bhana*

*Right – Nicholas Voon performs a finger prick test for the blood typing program. - photo by Nicholas Voon*

## **Cultural and Social Program**

There were many cultural programs throughout this conference including traditional Filipino games, local food tasting and even Filipino martial arts. However, the highlight of the week was the infamous Culutral Night where each country went on stage to perform; normally a traditional dance or song from their own country. It is indeed a colourful and exciting night with everyone dressed in their native traditional costumes. The Australian delegation focused on how laid back we are and danced to the songs “Sexy and I Know it”, “The Lazy Song” and the most infectious of all songs “Call Me Maybe”. To finish off the performance, we utilized the legendary Hawaii Five-O.

With regards to sightseeing and shopping, we were brought around to see both the modern as well as the historical facets of the Philippines. This included the National Museum, Fort Santiago Intramuros, Rizal Park and also SM Mall of Asia, which happens to be the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest shopping mall. The nightlife in Manila certainly did not disappoint, with local karaoke bars being the most popular among the locals.



*The Australian Delegation (most of us) with our prizes! - photo by Nicholas Voon*

## **Conclusion**

As wonderful as the week was, we still had to part ways. It was without a doubt an invaluable experience to have attended the 33<sup>rd</sup> Asian Medical Students' Conference in Manila. A whole new culture was explored, our eyes opened to the diverse health issues faced by other nations, and the friendships forged with memories that we'll keep close to our hearts forever. It would be safe to say that this won't be the last conference that we will attend. And many would agree that this is a significant turning point in our lives having learned and achieved so much.

***We would like to thank Professor Timothy Skinner (RCS), Professor Isabelle Ellis (RCS), Dr Deborah Wilson (RCS) and Professor James Vickers (UTAS – SoM) for all their support and assistance.***

## ***Personal Reflections***

“My only regret is not going to one of these conferences earlier in my medical education! I owe a lot to my fellow UTAS delegates for convincing me to go to this one. That – as one university – we managed to achieve two 1st placings for separate competitions was the icing on the cake. We definitely put UTAS on the map! From the welcome dinner on day one I knew this was going to be an event like no other. Being able to present research at an International conference was very rewarding and an opportunity I would love to take up again in the future. I was surprised with how receptive the judges were to our poster and the calm with which I was able to answer their questions – despite being quite nervous beforehand.

The conference got better with each day as people got to know each other. It was fascinating to discover how like-minded we all are as medical students, despite being from very different cultural backgrounds. Being able to share stories, learn different languages and try the local cuisine – minus the infamous Balut Egg - was one of my personal highlights. Hospitality and service are two fundamentals of Filipino culture and often it felt like we were being treated as VIP guests. I would love to come back to the Philippines in the future. Furthermore, I recommend that all medical students should attend conferences such as the AMSC.”

***Ashwin Bhana***  
***Med IV***  
***Rural Clinical School***

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“This conference is my first overseas medical students’ conference but definitely not my last. The knowledge I gained was immense. The one event that made a lasting impression on me was the community visit. I had the opportunity to experience health-inequality at its worst. I visited poverty-stricken communities of Manilla and St. Luke’s Hospital (11<sup>th</sup> biggest hospital in the world) on the same day. The stark contrast was a real eye opener! The children in poverty-stricken areas had poor hygiene and lacking health awareness while St. Luke’s Hospital caters to the rich (they have a vein-finder machine!). I never realised how big the health disparity was until the conference. What saddened me more was the amount of homeless children in Manilla. Come night fall, these children would roam the streets begging for money and food. It was heart-wrenching to watch them live in such poverty-stricken conditions yet not being able to do anything to help. It made me so much more grateful for all the things I have. It was such a humbling experience.

Besides that, being surrounded by like-minded medical students from all over the world was certainly an eye-opener. The friendships that were formed in that 1 week were incredible too. I now have friends from Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan and even all the way from Mongolia! I had the opportunity to learn about the different cultures too! The conference provided me with so many learning opportunities (not just medically but culturally as well) and I would definitely go for another conference again.”

***Tiffany Foo***  
***Med IV***  
***Launceston Clinical School***

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“For me, the conference was an enlightening experience about the health disparities in other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. One of the highlights for me was the small group discussion, where groups composed of people for all different nationalities were tasked with discussing the current and incoming medical issues in their countries, what steps were being taken by their countries to address the issues, and discuss other potential solutions. I found this interesting because of the diversity of problems and solutions that were highlighted by my group. Some countries had similar health issues to Australia, while others were vastly different, and all countries had different ideas about how to tackle their issues.

Overall the conference was a success, from the social and cultural events to the academic competitions, where Australia was hugely successful. As part of the winning scientific poster team, it was an absolute honour for our poster to be chosen from amongst the fantastic entries submitted by the other countries. The AMSC 2012 conference in Manila was a huge success, and I would encourage all interested medical students in Australia to apply to be a delegate at the next AMSC in Malaysia.”

***Kieran Longley***  
***Med IV***  
***Rural Clinical School***

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“This conference, themed ‘Surmounting the Health Disparities across Asia’, was by far one of the best conferences I've ever been to. Not only did we learn about the health issues that are present in every country, but also experience and see for ourselves the disparities that were present before our eyes, in Manila - the heart of Philippines – Manila. Manila is such a place where there are the rich and wealthy centred in the midst of poverty and poor living conditions. There were people strutting around with their cash and wealth in the higher-end shopping malls, and just a 10 minute drive away there are homeless kids begging for money; such a scene that is so appalling that it tugs at your heart strings. Living in Australia for some time now, I realised that we have been so lucky and sheltered that it is uncommon to see something like this in a first world nation like Australia. From going to this conference I feel like there is so much more that could be done to help out with the severity of the situation and that we can make a difference; definitely once I've graduated and am a practicing doctor.

Other aspects of the conference that were amazing included the fact that throughout just a short span of time of one week, I have made many friendships of which I've treasured and hold dearly. I've learnt so much, not only just of the Philippine culture, but that of others around the world; such an experience that I could not have gained elsewhere! This is an opportunity of which only medical students are privileged to have and I would definitely want to go for more of these conferences until I graduate!”

***Ve Wen Phang***  
***Med IV***  
***Rural Clinical School***

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“Going to Manila taught me much about health systems and health teaching throughout the world. Learning that medical degrees and responsibilities differed from country to country opened my eyes to how differently people view medicine in different countries. What struck me the strongest was how some country policies made health care a right, while others made it a privilege. Learning about private health care systems was quite hard; in that the inherent lack of equality was not easy to digest; the rich getting all they need and the poor struggling to see a doctor in the first place.

However, the drive and passion of medical students in Asia to be good doctors to all, made me very proud, and showed that the professionalism and hard work that is part of all medical professionals in Australia was found as strong if not stronger in all the people we met. This is what made Manila a thought changing and provoking experience.”

**Arjun Visa**  
**Med IV**  
**Hobart Clinical School**

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“This trip will be an unforgettable one. The 7 days in Manila opened my eyes to the variety of possibilities, opportunities and even problems. The issue of homelessness was one that really struck my heart. Seeing children sleeping along sidewalks made me ponder, “What was I doing when I was 5?” After that, I vowed that I will strive to contribute more to the wider society, be it in Australia or internationally. It made me realise that there is so much more to medicine than just studying and passing exams, more than taking a history and examining a patient. It is also about the children who live on the streets, with no roof over their heads, no food and no education. I hope each and every one of us will one day help to make a change, wherever we may be

Along this journey, I’ve also made lifelong friends from all corners of the world. This wonderful opportunity allowed me to be completely immersed in an array of cultures from the Japanese to the Mongolians, all whilst being in the Philippines!

Personally, I forced myself to step outside of my comfort zone: I attended the conference as a chief delegate, worked on 2 gold-winning posters and managed to obtain a position on the executive committee for an international organization. Never would I have ever dreamt of any of these but I gave it a shot and it all paid off!”

**Nicholas Voon**  
**Med IV**  
**Rural Clinical School**

**“Of all forms of Inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane”**  
- **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**