

Educational Value of Clinical Conferences

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Educational program is usually thought of developing syllabus, identifying competencies, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, and evaluation, however clinical conferences are often not given much importance in terms of their educational contents.¹ A well planned clinical conference adds to new knowledge which is of an equal importance for consultants as well as trainees. A clinical conference is an organized event, planned well ahead in time, with focused agenda and educational activities, centered on a theme.¹ This provides an opportunity, for both presenters as well other participants, to get maximum benefit out of it.² Special subject related workshops, hands-on skill sessions, meet the expert talks, virtual learning opportunities etc adds to the existing knowledge. The exchange of ideas and collaboration in future research, is also facilitated. Based upon their contents, conferences provide continuing medical education (CME) credits to the participants, many of which require passing online tests. It usually takes more than a year to plan and organize a clinical conference. Lot of funding is also required for its success.

Over the period of time many issues have surfaced in context of organizing these conferences. Greater participation of industry has influenced the most, even at international level. Many a times it appears that the conferences are held to take forward the agenda set by the pharmaceutical and equipment manufacturing companies. Though conflict of interest is declared and ethical obligations of disclosing their financial involvement are fulfilled, but a sense of discomfort persists among the participants. Same goes for invited speakers and those who are sponsored by the industry representatives. Another stark reality is the generation of funds in the name of research through these

conferences by various academic institutes, professional associations, organizations and societies.

In context of Pakistan, most of the clinical conferences appear an obligation rather than a planned educational activity. They are announced few months before the proposed dates, theme is hardly adhered to, sessions are ill planned, not scheduled as announced, criteria for including presentations is not transparent, and conference registration fee is often not appropriate. Many are held in hotels rather than academic institutions thus participation is limited. Most of the registered participants are sponsored by pharmaceutical companies, with spouse and children, thus it is more of an outing for them. Many are scheduled on same days thus it may be difficult for interesting persons to attend them. Most of the national conferences have no CME credits for various sessions thus their worth is debatable. It is therefore important to seriously think of improving quality of clinical conferences making them a truly educational activity with internationally acceptable CME credits. This can go a long way in imparting new knowledge and motivating research culture.

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