



Report on ASCoN conference -2008

1. Back ground of financial request :

On December 09-10-11 , 2008, the Seventh Asian Spinal Cord Network (ASCON) conference was held in Hanoi – Vietnam .

This conference was organized by Bach Mai Hospital through an organizing committee made up between the hospital administration staff and Handicap International Project.

ASCoN consists of a group of organizations in the Asia region that have come together to share and learn from each other in all aspects of spinal cord injury management, from initial treatment of the patient to re-integration of the person.

2. Rationale for the conference to be held in Vietnam :

In December 2005 , the ASCON conference was organized in Ho Chi Minh City, in the context of the first launch of SCI care in Vietnam. The conference in 2008 was meant to show the achievements made by the Ministry of Health of Vietnam and the project partners (national and international) on :

- how SCI care has developed in terms of care improvement and prevention of care
- how it made an impact on the lives of people with SCI in Vietnam
- highlighting the mechanism of the Vietnamese health system on how to make the SCI care nationwide accessible and affordable for the long term .

The main objectives for this conference were:

- To strengthen spinal injury services and human resource development for organizations and people working in spinal injury management in the Asia region by including Vietnam in this development .
- To share information, ideas and knowledge of best practices in spinal cord injury management among members and have this information available in Vietnamese language as well.
- To highlight the latest achievements of the set up of a Spinal Unit in Bach Mai hospital - Hanoi for the benefit of the Vietnamese health authorities and staff working in the field of rehabilitation.
- Next to these general objectives it was also a launching pad for setting up urodynamic care in Bach Mai , decision making process for care extension in 6 northern provinces in Vietnam , pre and post workshops and short trainings in the field of functional rehabilitation for SCI patients .

3. Meeting preparations

An organizing committee ensuring the local organization was set up by the hospital direction. This committee managed all the organizational aspects of the conference necessary in a country like Vietnam (local authorizations , invitations sending , rentals of conference venue , logistics , etc...) .

In order to reduce costs and in the wake of high inflation during the preparation period (January 2008 – December 2008) in Vietnam , it was decided not to contract rental of hotels (prices and costs could not be guaranteed) and/or convention centers . Bach Mai hospital provided conference space and logistics for this event .

The call for abstracts was done through website posting of information and a written invitations send through a mailing list of the Ministry of Health and Handicap International . Promotion visits and contacts were made throughout 2008 by Handicap International Staff and Bach Mai direction staff.

Selection of abstracts, presentations , workshops, posters and panel discussions were overseen by ASCoN executive members and members of the organizing committee .

Transportation during the conference needed to be kept at a minimum in order to avoid clogged traffic conditions and minimize challenges in relation to accessibility for wheelchair users attending the conference. It was tried to keep this at a minimum given the conference venue location .

The main language used at the conference was English. Simultaneous translation in Vietnamese was available through earphones for the Vietnamese delegates.

Thanks to the secretariat of ISCoS , we could benefit from the use of the guidelines for organizing and hosting ISCoS conferences . This extensive document was very helpful throughout the preparation process.

Main challenges encountered leading up to the conference preparation:

- due to political unrest in Bangkok – Thailand (travel itinerary transit point for most travelers coming to Vietnam) flight schedules needed to be adjusted for most delegates and speakers at the last week before the conference. This resulted in cancellations for a few delegates (regretfully) as well as increase in travel costs for the other delegates who had to change drastically their flight itinerary or airline company
- as mentioned above, the cost estimation and needed contracting done in beginning of 2008 (hotel room booking , translation services , catering) , underwent serious changes in exchange rate calculation (due to an inflation and deflation cycle) and could not be honored or guaranteed by the local companies , having to resort to last month contracting and cancellation of contracts , leading to global cost increases for these services .

4. Conference program and schedule

The conference book details the abstract presentations and the schedule. During the opening sessions divided in 2 keynotes lectures on medical management – prevention and

functional rehabilitation issues , an emphasis was put on the main subjects handling critical issues in SCI management ranging from surgical management , SCI accident prevention , standards of care , Asian experience of SCI management, networking , active rehabilitation (sports and psycho – social approach , urological management and sexual dysfunction . Special attention was given this year to the role of the Ministry of Health in expanding SCI care in Vietnam as well as the follow-up of the patients in the community through CBR. This was provided by 10 key speakers.

The abstract presentation sessions in the afternoon of the first day were selected from the abstracts calls, These 20 abstract presentations covered SCI epidemiology issues in Vietnam and medical rehabilitation subjects. Presenters of these sessions were eligible for a special prize called “ASCON – Livability observer ship “ The winners (One Best English presenter – one Best Vietnamese presenter) selected by a Jury of International and national SCI specialists will go to a center in Asia - Europe for a one month observer ship.

The second day was dedicated to technical workshops through a set of three two hour blocks of workshops that participants could choose from according their availability. Each participant could choose 3 workshops from a choice of 11 subjects. This was followed by a visit to the Spinal Unit department of Bach Mai Hospital and the subsequent cultural program in the evening.

Before this a meeting was organized between Bach Mai Rehabilitation centre , Handicap International representatives from Luxemburg and Belgium as well as Representatives of Livability in presence of the 6 hospital directors of Northern rehabilitation hospitals . This meeting confirmed the intention in planning the opening (by MOH) of six spinal Unit departments in these existing provincial rehabilitation centers. This was the result of a one year selection process done by Handicap International in Vietnam.

The third day continued (in the morning) with 2 abstract presentation sessions focusing on functional rehabilitation issues and lifelong follow-up issues for persons living with SCI. Here also, presenters were eligible for the special scholarship.

The last afternoon of the conference was dedicated to 3 panel discussions on :

- relevance on SCI care training standards , with a special introduction of the prevention guides for ASCON
- prevention of SCI accidents , with a presentation on data mapping , controversies around helmet use and SCI occurrence and need for indicator data on how prevention programs can make a difference
- relevance of peer counselors in SCI centers and their important role of helping SCI persons to adjust after an accident .

The closing part of the conference was done by announcing the winners of the special scholarship, announcement of the next conference host and thanking statements by all.

5. Outcomes and indicators after the conference

On the first day of the conference, 420 delegates had registered for the conference, 62 among them were coming from 22 different countries, the other part from Vietnam. For the workshop sessions, over 230 persons registered for attendance to the three presentations blocks.

This year's opening session received special attention from several embassies and National ministry departments. The Irish Embassy representative Mr Sean Hoy emphasized the need for socio-economic attention for the plight of persons living with SCI. MOH represented by Doctor Tran Van Chuong retraced a brief history of rehabilitation in Vietnam as well as its needed focus on community based care. Decentralization of quality services is key to making SCI care accessible to all in need.

The notion of prevention programs towards the public to avoid SCI injury came out strong by a presentation of Doctor Douglas Brown, chair of the ISCOS prevention committee. Vietnam has an active national injury prevention program and needed links between MOH , WHO and ASCON supporting this program and feeding it with SCI prevention specifics were started after the conference .

Professor JJ Wyndaele stated again that the ASCON conferences have been since 2001 an important element in developing the SCI care in South Asia (thanks to the support and recognition of ISCOS and its regions) and that ASCON is on the way to continuously expand its range of issues that are being addressed in improving care and the life for persons living with SCI in that region .

There were three session of abstract presentations covering epidemiology of SCI in Vietnam and Asia, medical rehabilitation subjects, functional rehabilitation subjects and social integration. The presenters of these sessions (38 abstracts in total : 20 Vietnamese – 18 international) aimed for the special price. This feature (sponsored by Livability) provided an additional incentive for (especially) the local doctors and health staff working actually in 5 SCI centers in Vietnam. This participation level was a huge contrast with the 5 ASCON conference in HCM where this number did not exceed 10 % of the presentations (while here it was over 50 %).

Creation of a local jury and international jury to select the best presenter is explained in the annexes. A specific form and selection criteria form was constituted and this can be used for further conferences also. The laureates of the price were Doctor Nguyen Thi Kim Lien from Bach Mai rehabilitation centre and Mahomed Shariful (OT) from CRP – Bangladesh .

The workshop sessions had an average attendance between minimum 40 delegates and up to 130 according the subjects. This conference witnessed also the launch of a urodynamic system to be set up at the Spinal Cord Unit department of Bach Mai hospital. The workshop in this regard (prepared by Professor Madesbacher and Professor Wyndaele) from set up of system to live demonstration of patients and demonstration of specific therapeutic options from Doctor Loechner-Ernst showed to the Vietnamese public all the options available for neurogenic bladder management (general hospitals as well as at provincial level).

Wheelchair provision, active rehabilitation, prevention of complications, sexuality and fertility, special seating assessment were also covered in the workshop sessions of the second day .

The last afternoon in the panel discussion the three subjects regarding prevention guidelines issuing on SCI issues and peer counseling relevance brought on interesting discussions . The following outcomes were presented:

- ASCON (prevention guides), PVA (consumer and CPG), WHO (standards on wheelchair distribution), ICORD (SCIRE) have been lately issuing several guidelines, and principles of care that can help health staff and patients. Each guideline was briefly introduced to the public. Discussion that followed stated that the follow-up, use and adjustment to the local setting of these guides is of utmost importance. The SCI prevention guides were also presented in Vietnamese language version. Since November 2008, they have been distributed at MOH Vietnam and presented at the Injury 2008 conference held in Hanoi – November 2008. A CD was provided with all these data to all participants.
- The prevention session panel presented a data base collection system and mapping proposal, the Asian Injury Prevention Foundation representative made a very visual presentation on helmet wearing for children and its protective features for SCI accidents. Discussion of the topics with the audience focused on the need for awareness of prevention and its proven effect on sustainability – improvement of health in the long term. Existing prevention programs address mostly the main issues. SCI prevention just needs to use these programs and feed them with specific information regarding SCI.
- The use of peer counseling programs came to discussion as a means to help the SCI patient and his family to better adjusts his lifespan. In ASCON countries it seems like Peer counseling services are the only service available for SCI persons administered by non formal trained staff. Discussion that followed presented the need for a more formal training process for peer counseling staff, their role in the rehab team and the economic necessity of having them play the role of trained psychologists. ASCON is planning to start a process in writing guides on peer counseling services and ways to formalize a minimum of contend in training, service package for patients as well as tools to measure progress and state of mind.

6. Networking and information sharing.

As usual the conference provided many specific contacts and opportunities that were used to enhance ties and future exchanges, here are a few facts and contacts :

- Presence of Chinese delegates that shared experiences in regard to self help groups and adjustment process for persons with SCI . There will be more contacts with some HI project staff from Sichuan Province regarding CBR programs that cater to SCI patients as well as exchange of data and training
- presence of Dctr Bonne Lee from Sydney with which we discussed and planned to share data on injury causes and how to integrate them into the mapping strategies-objectives of the ISCOS prevention committee
- Group of MOH Sri Lankan doctors and health staff interested in setting up SCI units in provinces. After the conference they visited the Danang Rehabilitation centre

(central province of Vietnam) to observe the set up of SCI care at provincial level. This was supported by Livability

- a part from the meeting with the 6 rehabilitation hospitals (commented in this document in point 3) planning was done to continue the exchange between provincial hospitals in Vietnam for training and experience building . Leads and indications were exchanged at national level to create a structure that would set up an SCI network in Vietnam once that the critical level of the recognition of SCI care at Bach Mai Centre (as a national training centre) is finalized end of 2009.
- presence of executive director of Motivation to apply the WHO guidelines in wheelchair provision in Vietnam by testing wheelchair models on SCI patients in 2009.
- on the day after the conference a one day workshop was organized on PT management and SCI , active rehabilitation session for OT – PT and medical rounds for doctors and nurse at the Bach Mai Spinal Unit . Participants from Sri Lanka , Nepal , Bangladesh, Australia and Vietnam attended these workshops.

7. Feedback from the delegates - recommendations

A feedback form was provided to all delegates and had to be returned to the registration desk at the end of the conference, in exchange for a certificate of participation.

The codification of the data from this questionnaire highlighted the following points :

- high rate of attendance of all delegates to the sessions
- logistics , catering , lunches and breaks were satisfactory
- accessibility had some challenges regarding lunch period
- workshop sessions were highly appreciated
- simultaneous translation at the conference was satisfactorily

8. Financial budget for the conference (see annex)

- A provisional budget was dressed in the preparation phase of this conference focusing on the costs of organization, invitation sending, visibility for sponsors and support for selected delegates (fees and transport).
- In regard to income generation for the conference, the registration fees and sponsors were the main income.
- A special thanks goes to ISCoS , ICORD , Livability (Irish Aid) and SPIRIT for the provision of grants that allowed delegates to attend and cover the costs of the conference.
- Additional budget was assured through the Handicap International project budget lines of training and conference organization.
- A deficit for the whole organisation was registered in the accounts due to the higher mentioned reasons: inflation and last minute change in travel schedules and planning.

9. Others – miscellaneous

The usual encounters during dinners and breaks were an important feature for making contacts and socializing. The cultural evening could show also this year the talents and culture of the 22 nationalities present. A selected few made very good presentations. The

Ethnic museum provided also for an ideal environment. The catering service had some problems in meeting demand and the diversity of the participants.

Breaks, lunches and momento provision were kept at an austere level in order to keep the overhead costs down to the benefit of delegates' travel and fee expenses.

The visibility of the sponsors and financiers of the conference was ensured in the program book, on a series of banners at the venue of the conference. A press statement was distributed to around 30 media representatives from written media. National Television did also a feature on the conference for the national news on Vietnamese TV. Several articles in local newspapers were published as well as the HI Luxemburg communication department that issued specific articles on this conference and its supporters.

9. Conclusion / summary

This conference is considered as a success given the results expected from a standpoint of ASCoN. The aim as gathering key member countries of ASCoN was reached. The achievements in the field of SCI in the last 5 years in Vietnam could be highlighted to the ASCoN assembly and the Vietnamese delegates and Ministry of Health. The presence of key speakers familiar with Vietnam SCI project and recognized by ISCoS provided this conference a high level of expertise. Launching of guidelines on prevention succeeded and expansion of SCI care in Northern provinces in Vietnam was kickstarted in the margins of this conference. Although some problems were encountered with loss of goods and accessibility, and international events leading up to the conference made travel by plane challenging for some countries. Cancellations were minimal. Special thanks should go to Bach Mai hospital and local immigration office for swift production of visas and administrative procedures. Special attention on interpretation English – Vietnamese was necessary in order to expand the scope of communication to the Vietnamese health personnel as well as for official protocol reasons.

We would like to thank all the key sponsors and organizations that supported this conference financially.

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