

DEVELOPING PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH IN ASIA PACIFIC – WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

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INTRODUCTION

In this communication which was first published in the Conference Handbook of the 2010 Asia Pacific Primary Care Research Conference which took place in the weekend of 4-5 Dec 2010 in Gallery Hotel in Singapore, the experience of developing primary care research in Asia Pacific is described. In this context, Primary Care research is taken to be synonymous to family medicine research or general practice research.

Developing primary care research is a challenge that the Family Medicine Research Interest Groups in Asia Pacific is intent on making it a reality, starting with the RENAP (Research Network in Asia Pacific) Workshop held in Phuket in 2004 from July 10-12. The objectives of that workshop is evergreen namely, (1) to develop family medicine research capacity in the Asia Pacific region, (2) to provide delegates with hands-on approach to develop a research project, and (3) to encourage cross border collaboration.

Since then various research meetings have been held to further drive the objectives of the Phuket workshop. Our Malaysian colleagues have been a strong force in moving things forward. In a research meeting attended by a handful in Kuala Lumpur in 2008 it was felt that we need to think of how to create a buzz for primary care research that will be self-sustaining.

The conclusion in that brainstorm meeting was to try out the Formula 1 Races idea of good research prizes, and good hands-on research training opportunities -- just like in the Formula 1 Races. This culminated in the 2009 Asia Pacific Primary Care Research Conference hosted by our Malaysian colleagues which was held successfully from 5-6 December at Melaka, Malaysia. There were 136 participants from 5 countries: Taiwan, Singapore, Myanmar, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Wonca Asia Pacific region sponsored 6 participants with a total cost of RM3000.

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In the Melaka Conference, there were research presentations for the top 3 prizes in the oral presentations of USD1000 for the top award called the Rajakumar Award, and other two awards of USD500 each. There were also three best poster awards of USD500 each. The research training tracks included research methodology, biostatistics, qualitative research, and medical writing.

We are pleased to build on the successes of the Inaugural Asia Pacific Primary Care Research Conference. In this conference there will be the Rajakumar Award, and two oral presentation awards, as well as three poster awards. We have added the research championship in a training track co-ordinated by Dr Tan Ngiap Chuan. The other research training tracks are: a track on qualitative research using the Delphi Study; a track on family medicine research protocol from idea to execution; and a track on designing and understanding impactful primary care studies.

THE PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH AGENDA

There are many ways we can define the primary care research agenda. One useful way is to group the primary care research agenda as what the European General Practice Research Network (EGPRN) has done into four core areas:

- (a) Clinical research (with outcomes at the patient level, and measuring patients' health issues including function or quality of life);
- (b) Health services research (focusing on doctor or system related questions and outcomes);
- (c) Research on education and teaching in general practice;
- (d) Research on what is adequate research methodology.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Building research capacity is an important primary care research development strategy. Attention to this will ensure the research manpower pipeline is kept flowing. In this context various activities have been proposed as objectives for the Wonca triennium, 2010 to 2013:

1. Create self-sustaining webpage – AP Region webpage as information and archival site for activities, proceedings, papers, storehouse of research tools, blogs of collaborative research developments, information, notices and announcements of research activities

2. Be information point of FM research activities of the Region – research training meetings, and national meetings
3. Create forum for ReNAP projects to happen – identify champions, project leaders, project details – look for external funds e.g. Asian Development Bank, WHO, or National funding.
4. Develop a training and development forum for researchers – Workshops, Seminars -- Working Party initiated, member country initiated. These activities should synergize activities and avoid duplication.
5. Manage and grow AP Research manpower development funds -- Use of AP Region subsidy funds in assisting research delegates to meetings, and workshops
6. Utilize research meetings to attract participation of non-member country organizations – with the hope of encouraging them to join WONCA

SECONDARY MULTIPLIER EFFECTS

It is hoped that the research conferences such as this one could generate secondary multiplier effects through the participants going home to their respective countries and generating interest and outcomes for better care through relevant primary care research.

THE ASIA PACIFIC FAMILY MEDICINE JOURNAL

There is a need for platforms where research findings can be shared. Besides local journals there is the Asia Pacific Family Medicine Journal. The idea is to contribute to all publications and not only to the top tier ones. And of course remember to contribute papers to the Regional Family Medicine journal as well.

THE 2010 ASIA PACIFIC PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

The 2010 Primary Care Research Conference has achieved what it sets out to do. Attract attendance to a Primary Care Research Conference by making it a positive experience, just like the predecessor Conference in Melaka, Malaysia in 2009.

Research learning and teaching

The four tracks of research learning and teaching in these Conference were successful. The presentations of the output from the Research Championship bore the effects of the polishing by the coaches in each of the four presentations made. We look forward to the research questions being answered by the next Research Conference in 2011 in Malaysia.

Research competition and awards

Congratulations go to the winners of the 2010 Primary Care Research Competitions. The presentations had much to tell about what has been found about Primary Care practice. The following are the winners:

Best Poster Award:

- 1st Dr Tin Myo Han (Myanmar)
- 2nd Mr Wee Liang En (Singapore)
- 3rd Mr Ray Lai Tian Rui (Singapore)

Rajakumar Award – The Best Oral Presentation:

- 1st A/Prof Tan Boon Yeow (Singapore)
- 2nd A/Prof Nik Sherina Hanafi (Malaysia)
- 3rd Dr Tan Kok Heng Adrian (Singapore)

Wong Heck Sing Award – The Best Oral Presentation from Students and Trainees:

Mr Wee Liang En (Singapore)

Research Championship 2010 – The Awards on Research Question and Study Design:

- 1st Dr Moey Kirm Seng Peter & Dr Chang Ngai Kin Christopher (Singapore)
- 2nd Dr Low Lian Leng & Dr Ang Yee, Gary (Malaysia)
- 3rd Dr Ngieng Kiong Kiong, Dr Kok Sim Hui & Dr Lenny Martini Bte Hamden (Malaysia)
- Tie for 3rd Dr Peter Sathiyathan, Dr Abdul Hafiz Mohamad Ghani & Dr Kong Sie Zin (Malaysia)

Thanks

The success of the 2010 Asia Pacific Primary Care Research Conference owed a great deal to many stakeholders – promoters of primary care research in Singapore and Malaysia, participants, well wishers and sponsors, the Host Organising Committee, and the College of Family Physicians, Singapore Secretariat staff. We will put our energies together again for the 2011 Asia Pacific Primary Care Research Conference

AN OPEN INVITATION

Until we see you in Malaysia in 2011, research participants please hone your research skills and set your sights to participate in the next Asia Pacific Primary Care Research Conference.

CONCLUSION

The application of the Formula 1 Races idea to develop Family Medicine Research appears to be working as a social experiment to promote Primary Care Research. We are succeeding where hitherto we have not.