

AsMA: Science and Professional Practice

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It is important, on occasion, to consider what purposes an organisation exists to provide. A crucially important one of ours is to support the exchange of scientific information across the disciplines we represent to as wide an audience of researchers and practitioners as we can. Much of that we do, through our own journal and our annual scientific meeting. Below I will write about one of the important preparatory steps taken each year for the latter. However, first I write about an aspect of our linkage with others to support that vital role of disseminating knowledge of research and practice.

International Congress of Aviation & Space Medicine

For some years AsMA has offered to the organizers of forthcoming International Congresses of Aviation & Space Medicine (ICASM) the opportunity to inform our own registrants of their forthcoming conference through offering a stand at our annual meeting. Our President also attends the Congress that occurs during their year in office to represent the Association. This strengthens the links with AsMA and demonstrates our global outlook. This year the ICASM took place in New Delhi, India, and I was honoured to represent the Association.

India is a large country with a huge population. It has a thriving commercial aviation sector and its own space programme. It also has a large military aviation force and a very active aerospace medicine society. That society has a scientific meeting each year, but on three occasions now it has extended that meeting into a full International Congress. Such Congresses, conducted in accordance with the directions given by the International Academy of Aviation & Space Medicine, have one named plenary lecture, the Allard lecture, and one named panel, the Ernsting panel. The rest of the programme is conducted as a single track of oral scientific presentations and posters. In addition there is a day set aside for an educational visit, on this occasion to an Indian Air Force base.

One of the strengths of our specialities is the ability for them to cross national boundaries and to understand the common challenges of the flight environment. Nevertheless, the approaches taken to those challenges can show marked differences and we all benefit from seeing how others tackle a shared problem. It is also of considerable interest when, for reasons of geography or topography, one nation has developed expertise in conducting air operations in a region that poses specific and unusual problems such as extreme heat or cold or high terrestrial altitudes. India has those and can bring the benefit of considerable experience to inform others what can and perhaps more importantly, what should not, be attempted. For example, during sustained high altitude terrestrial operations it is important to know oxygen usage limits and the maximum acceptable duration of deployments to such regions, topics in which the Indian Air Force has particular knowledge.

Another benefit of such meetings is to ensure that all the participants with an interest in a topic are present as there is only a single track. Thus, presentations with differing views on an issue

are likely to be attended by the same audience, stimulating scientific debate. The differences between results may raise questions, which may help elucidate causation.

This year the international community at the Congress was relatively modest, but all gained considerable insight into the specific challenges of the region and had the opportunity to see and hear some excellent science.

AsMA Scientific Programming Committee

Each year a dedicated group get together, under the direction of the Chair of the Scientific Program Committee, to assess and select abstracts submitted for consideration for the forthcoming annual scientific meeting. With over 600 abstracts submitted this year it was a mammoth task and Patricia MacSparran and her colleagues, as well as the Home Office staff, are to be congratulated on managing a bumper crop.

A group of around 70 members gathered in Houston in November to undertake the crucial peer review of every abstract. More presentations are submitted than there are spaces in the program and there is therefore an appropriate degree of competition for selection. By dividing the abstracts into subject areas and establishing specialist teams to conduct systematic reviews of the abstracts, an objective assessment conducted by a knowledgeable group is achieved. That the reviewers are "blinded" to author and institution details underlines the integrity of the process. The quality of discussion on the scientific merit of abstracts is excellent and appropriate. Those abstracts chosen are then framed into the complex, multi-track program we have available at the scientific meeting. All those selected are to be congratulated in coming through this process. For those unsuccessful this time, we are grateful to you for your submission and would be happy to help guide and support you towards another abstract next year.

Finally, having attended the Scientific Program Committee abstract review for about 20 years, I would offer the observation that there is great value in taking part. Members of great experience are there and you get to see what makes a good abstract. This is great training for a young researcher or clinician working in aerospace medicine. You just need to be a member of AsMA and offer your services to the Chair of the Scientific Program Committee. So, next year you could be sitting round a table with some of the most talented and experienced of our community reviewing the abstracts for 2018.



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