

Wound Care Conferences: Maximizing Your Educational Experience



BY Heather L. Orsted

Over the course of each year many health-care organizations in North America offer educational conferences that present topics of interest to the wound-care practitioner. With time and financial resources often scarce, wound-care clinicians need to get the best value from any conference they attend. Here are some tips on choosing the right conferences to attend and maximizing your educational experience once you are there.

Selecting the Right Conference

To select the conference that is going to be a good fit for you, you will need to reflect on where you are currently in your wound-care practice and where you want to go. Once you've identified your needs, you are better able to select the conference with the best chance of fulfilling them. Remember, needs may not be just educationally based, but may also revolve around networking with national organizations, interdisciplinary colleagues and industry.

- Not all conferences are created equal. Choose conferences that have a reputation for variety, high-quality presenters, and the type of sessions that suit your learning style.
- Support your national organization when possible. Industry-sponsored events can provide excellent educational opportunities, but your attendance at such events should not detract from national organization conference attendance. Attending the confer-

ence of your national association helps to not only keep your organization afloat but also serves to continually challenge your organization to meet your educational needs, thus improving opportunities for everyone in your area of practice.

- If you need to travel to another city to attend a conference, make sure the conference has a good selection of sessions that apply to your current practice and your goals for the future. It's not worth the expense if there are only one or two sessions that will fulfill your needs. If it's in the same city as the one in which you live, you may be able to attend for just one day. In that case, a variety of sessions spread over several days is less important for you.

Plan Ahead

Once you have selected your conference, make your hotel reservation. If you don't receive a confirmation via e-mail or fax, contact the hotel. A week or two before the conference, call and confirm your reservation again. If you have a change in travel plans, or get delayed anywhere along the route, call your hotel to advise them of the change in your arrival time. Plan your airline reservations and other travel services in the same way.

- Check the long-range weather forecast before you go and pack accordingly. Layers work well in places where the temperature is unpredictable.

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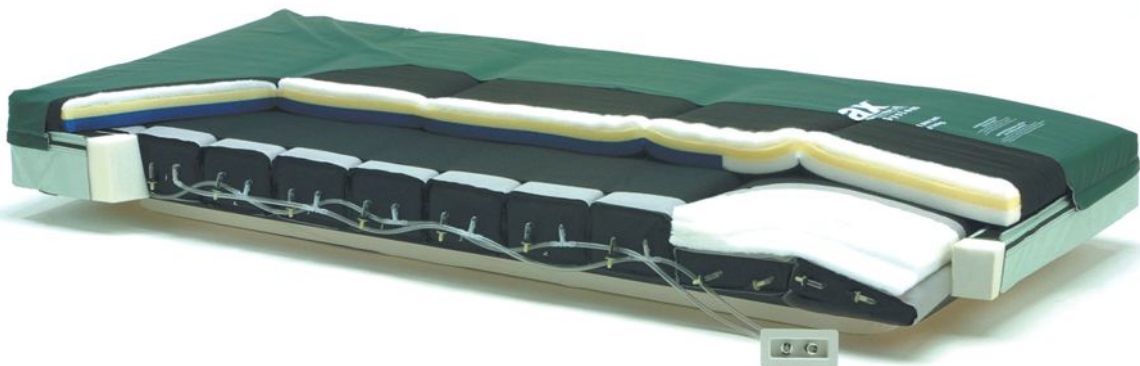


A French version of this article is available in the *Wound Care Canada* section of the CAWC Web site at www.cawc.net.



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- Gather all of your travel documentation in one place (e.g., tickets, maps, reservations, programs, photo ID for the airport) after making photocopies. Give the photocopies to a significant other or carry them in a different location (in case one set gets lost or stolen). Note that most foreign countries now require a passport, and that as of this year photo ID is required for air travel even within Canada.
- Provide your significant others with information on how to contact you in your absence.

Don't Leave Home Without...

Make a checklist of all of the items you'll need while at the conference—cell phone, charger, laptop with appropriate cables, connectors and devices (memory sticks, CDs), local access numbers for e-mail (if appropriate), business cards, schedule, airline tickets, hotel confirmation, etc.—and physically check them off as you load them into your carry-on bag (not into checked-in luggage).

Always leave room in your luggage for material that you collect at the conference.

Start to Plan your Conference Experience

Begin to familiarize yourself with the conference agenda, speakers, exhibitors and attendees as far in advance of the conference as possible. Write down three to five goals that you plan to achieve while attending the conference. Based on your goals, select the sessions you wish to attend and plot them in your calendar. Give each one a priority number (like 1, 2 and 3) in case you run out of steam and can't attend all the sessions you'd checked off. Make sure you at least attend the high-priority ones.

Make a list of the people and companies participating in the conference you want to meet with and where their exhibit is, if appropriate.

Try to avoid taking other work with you to the conference. It will detract from your conference experience,

and you will feel guilty because you won't have time to focus on it anyway.

Before the Sessions Begin

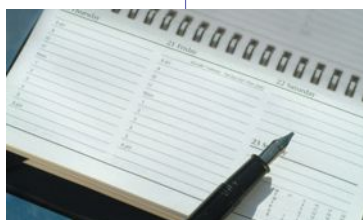
As soon as possible, stop by the registration table or desk to pick up a delegate package, which will include a copy of the final conference program. Skim the program and highlight the sessions that interest you. Make special note of any keynote addresses. Make a daily schedule to tell yourself where to be, and when.

During the Conference

Managing Yourself and Your Time

Attend opening, plenary, keynote, and closing sessions. Support peers and colleagues by attending their sessions. Attend both oral and poster presentation sessions on topics in your discipline. Attend a few sessions in areas that are new to you. An interdisciplinary understanding of the world is a good thing, and increasingly necessary. Check your schedule from time to time to see whether you are attaining the conference goals you identified before you arrived.

- Try to maximize the time you spend in sessions, but don't overdo it. Conferences are intense and the days can be long.
- Stick to your game plan of attending selected sessions, but be flexible.



Key Conference Survival Tips

- Get enough sleep.
- Plan some time to do something just for yourself.
- If you have a physical fitness routine, try to follow it while you're at the conference. You'll be able to concentrate better and have more energy throughout the day.
- Eat healthy meals and snacks to enhance your concentration and prevent drowsiness.

- Actively participate by asking questions of poster and oral presenters. This is a chance to network.
- Make notes on aspects of oral and poster presentations that contribute to their effectiveness. Use those notes when you are developing your own presentations in the future. Likewise, note those things that detract from effectiveness and avoid doing them.
- Arrange to attend sessions with another colleague. Maximize your learning by discussing the content of the session with the colleague afterward.
- Sit in a strategic location so you can hear and see the

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presentation. Be aware of your body position and alignment to avoid neck strain. Take a break when you need to.

- Have some fun! Conferences often have banquets, dances, performances, or field trips. Take advantage of these as your schedule permits.
- If the conference is in a city other than the one in which you live, plan some time to take in the sites. Because time is tight during conferences, you should book a few extra days to accomplish this. However, you can build in some sightseeing time during the conference, such as a short walk before dinner. This will give you a chance to experience the city as well as refresh your mind and body before the next day of sessions begins without interfering in your daily schedule of conference-related sessions and events.

Making the Most of Networking with Colleagues

Everyone at a conference has something in common, so it's easy to connect with people you don't know.

- Make use of the question-and-answer period, and introduce yourself before you ask the question.
- Talk to other delegates who attend the same sessions you do.
- Always wear your name tag so others get to know you, but remember to remove your name tag when leaving the conference, for safety and security reasons.
- In workshop-type settings, try to get into a group with people you don't know, rather than the colleagues you see every day. You'll expand your network and learn about different situations and styles.
- If you have met fellow practitioners from previous conferences whom you do not see regularly, plan to meet at lunch to catch up and exchange ideas.

- Exchange business cards with people you meet.
- If the organization that's hosting the conference has a booth, introduce yourself to the people staffing the booth. Check out what resources the organization has and see if there is a "fit" for you.

Take Advantage of Access to Exhibitors

Most conferences have exhibitors displaying their products and explaining their services. This is a good time to talk to the sales reps, ask questions, and watch demonstrations.

Evaluate the Conference

During the day, jot down your impressions and reflections of your conference experiences. This will help when it comes time to fill out your evaluation form. Make sure you complete the evaluation forms to support the planning of future educational events and conferences.

- On your way home, review the notes that you have jotted down, and begin to organize a written reflection. Some ideas include the following: expectations versus reality, new things I learned, surprises, how I will use the conference to inform my own practice, tips on giving oral and poster presentations, tips that should be added to this list, how I attained my goals.
- Provide your employer with a written report about the conference and how your new knowledge will improve practice; it will motivate your employer to send you to future conferences.
- Share the information or your new learning with your colleagues who did not have the opportunity to attend.

Ethics and the Conference Experience

- Show professional behaviour and support for colleagues by attending conference sessions rather than shopping, going to the spa, or touring the city. If your conference is in an attractive geographical location, schedule a few days before or after the conference to do these things.
- Whenever possible, try to attend the entire conference. It is not appropriate to simply appear for the session in which you are presenting.
- If you are attending with a significant other who is not



registered for the conference, claim reimbursement only for those expenses that you would have incurred if attending the conference alone. For example, if a single hotel room is \$180, and double occupancy is \$200, seek reimbursement only for \$180.

- If you combine business with pleasure (e.g., stay a few extra days in the host city), seek reimbursement only for expenses associated with the conference. For example, airfare costs the same whether you stay four days or eight days so you may seek full reimbursement for airfare, but extra hotel days would not be reimbursable.



Taking Care of Business

Save receipts for any reimbursable expenses such as meals, airfare, hotel, airport taxis and local transportation. Seek reimbursement in a timely fashion (typically within 30 days). Use reimbursement forms provided by your agency and organize your receipts so that they are easily processed.

Planning well is a cornerstone for achieving your educational and professional goals, and these tips can help you as you prepare for your participation at your next wound-care conference. ☺

Resources

www.techwr-l.com/techwhirl/magazine/gettingstarted/tipsforconferences.html

www.graggadv.com/direct_marketing/Gragg_Guide_To_Attending_Conferences.phpo

www.iaapmichigan.org/Documents/Tips%20for%20Attending%20Conferences.doc

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specializes in health and wellness communications and has been associated with the CAWC since 2000.

Do you have a tip for getting the most out of a conference?

E-mail us at WCCeditor@cawc.net and we'll publish the best of them on the *Wound Care Canada* Web site.

Education News

International Interdisciplinary Wound Care Course (IIWCC) graduates now have the opportunity to undertake the second part (of three) in pursuit of a Master's (non-thesis) or Clinical Teacher Certificate.

Interprofessional Applied Practical Teaching and Learning in the Health Professions is a dynamic certificate course offered by Dr. Helen Batty and presented by the Department of Public Health Sciences at the University of Toronto. This course will offer two credits toward a Master's degree, plus prepare participants for the one-credit education field practicum. IIWCC graduates will already have the basis for three credits (which may need some additional work to complete). Another similar course from Public Health Sciences offers two credits, and electives offer another two credits, for a

total of 10 credits required for the proposed Master's degree. The format for Dr. Batty's course is very similar to that of the IIWCC: it is distance learning with two residential weeks (Monday to Friday) in Toronto, one in October, one in May. The program was originally designed to give physicians the background they need to teach medical school and residents, but it has now been modified into an interprofessional format.

Participants who are not interested in working toward a Master's degree may enroll as continuing education students and obtain a certificate of completion or complete the first half of a Clinical Teacher Certificate. For more information, please contact Sandra Meisner at inter.wcc@utoronto.ca or go to the Web site at www.utoronto.ca. ☺