

Organizing a SAARC dermatology congress — a roadmap to success

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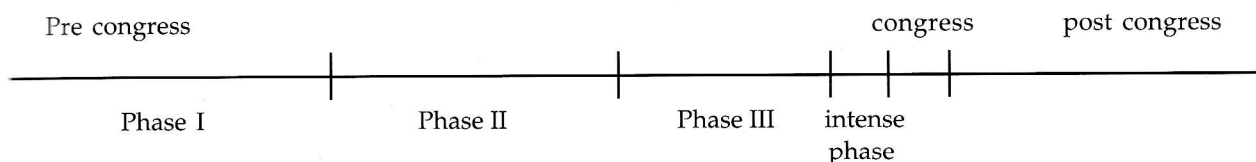
As we breathed a sigh of relief and dust settled on the 8th SARCD we realized that there was one more task to be completed, for the benefit of our future generations of Dermatologists namely to record how we navigated the road towards a successful SARCD. The single most important factor behind this success was the enthusiasm, dedication and unity among the organizers. When we embarked on the project we had no guidelines other than the carefully preserved notes from the 3rd SARCD held 10 years previously. Hence it was a steep learning curve for us and we humbly share our observations and experiences and make no claims to this being a comprehensive document. We have attempted to present the steps in a chronological manner but some repetition could not be avoided.

1) The preliminaries

- The first step is to appoint the chairperson, secretary general, treasurer and the core organizing committees.
- Make a rough estimate about the number of participants based on the attendance at previous events.
- Decide on the dates of the conference including the duration of the conference. When setting the dates consider the following:
 - Avoid overlap with major international conferences in Dermatology, other major medical conferences in the country or any major political events and religious holidays.
- Pick the venue: consider the size of the conference centre and the size of the halls in relation to the number of delegates expected, availability of halls for parallel sessions, facilities for social functions, in-house accommodation facilities for international delegates, facilities for accompanying persons including proximity to shopping complexes and parking facilities.
- Consider the budget: a basic estimate of income and expenditure will be useful at this stage.
- Start the preliminary communications: having decided on the above, this information needs to be communicated to the president and secretary general of SARAD and member organizations of the SARAD so that any unforeseen problems are avoided at the outset.

2) Timeline

- Start (01) one year ahead. Remember that the tasks for the key phases, namely pre-congress, congress and post-congress need to be identified. Divide the pre-congress time into 3 phases
 - o Phase I : 1-6 months
 - o Phase II : 7-10 months
 - o Phase III: 11th and 12th months of which the last fortnight will be the intensive phase
- A tentative timeline needs to be decided on.
- Incorporate the deadlines into the timeline.



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3) Specifics of the conference

- Logo
- Theme

Once the logo and the colour theme are decided, try to continue the same on all printed and electronic material throughout the congress.

- Local organizing committee
- Layout of tasks
- Event organizer: consider the magnitude of the conference, ability to work comfortably with the committee, affordability of the fee within the budget and previous experience in organizing similar events
- Website: employ web designer
- Facebook page for the event

Phase I — starting 12 months prior to event — 1st — 6th month

- **Topics and speakers**
 - o At this stage only basic topics and possible speakers from the international, regional and the local scene can be outlined
 - o Start communicating with potential speakers and book their calendar
- **Decide on chief guest and invite him/her early**
- **Registration process**
 - o Decide on fees for local and foreign delegates
 - o Online registration
 - o Set up payment gateway. Be aware of requirements of local banks and government regulations regarding foreign currency

- **Advertising the event**

On hindsight we realized that this was the weakest link in our congress and we should have had a separate media committee to handle this task.

- o Make the first announcement, both in electronic and print versions
- o Obtain messages from the organizing chairpersons for 1st announcement
- o All advertising should be done in print and electronic formats
- o Consider the following avenues for advertising
 - Scientific journals
 - Emails
 - Through local, regional and international societies
- o Routine calls for attendees before each important deadline. It may be a good idea to send E mails as a countdown before each deadline e.g. "7 days more before early bird registration ends!"
- **Package for speakers**
 - o Policy decision on perks offered
- **Preparatory checklist and responsibility allocation**
 - o Identify tasks for subcommittees
 - o Decide on the level of involvement of the event organizer and the sub committees
 - o Continue communication with subcommittees
- **Sponsorship**
 - Decide on sponsorship packages

- Think beyond pharma companies: Sri Lanka Telecom, Sri Lankan Airlines, Conventions Bureau, WHO etc
- **Scientific programme**
 - o Pre congress session
 - o No. of parallel sessions
 - o Time for free papers — try to accommodate as many as possible
 - o No. of posters and mode of display (printed/ E poster)

When creating the program there are several factors you should consider, such as:

- Enough time for registration in the morning
- Include a 15 minute slot in the first session for the opening of the conference, which should be made by a member of the sponsoring organization and the chair of the committee
- Adequate breaks between sessions
- Coffee breaks should last for at least 30 minutes
- Lunch breaks should last for at least 1 hour
- Have extra time for poster presentations
- Allow for a five minute break between presentations so that attendees can choose to leave or change the lecture room
- Try to have presentations in each session and same lecture room that cover the same or similar area
- Have both the name of the presentation and the presenter on the program. You may also want to include affiliation details
- It is advised to use presentations given by local members as the opening lecture, so as to avoid any delays during the first session
- Also try to have two-three last minute backup presentations (if you can) in case that there is a last minute cancellation
- **Free papers**
- Abstract deadline
- Abstract submission method
- Abstract submission guidelines
- Reviewing of abstracts
 - o Decide on reviewers
 - o Online review/by email

Phase II

It may be a good idea to recruit a coordinator to help with the increasing workload over the next 6 months. A pre intern doctor with a sound grasp of information technology will be ideal.

Following is a list of tasks for the sub committees we prepared for the 8th SARCD. This is by no means exhaustive but may be helpful as a model for future events.

Scientific Committee

- Preparation of the scientific programme
- Handling of abstracts
 - o Abstract submission guidelines
 - o Organize review process for abstracts, prepare guidelines for reviewers
 - o Prepare guidelines for presentations
 - o Handling of E poster and display schedules

- o Inform presenters about reviewers comments
 - o Any correspondence with presenters / invited speakers
 - o Correspondence with the web designer re. scientific programme and abstracts
- Distribution of certificates to presenters/ speakers (to liaise with publications committee)

CME points

- Registration book at entrance to each hall
- Decide on CME credits
- Process of awarding CME credits

Registration committee

- Design the registration form
- Decide on registration number (numeric/ alpha numeric) LKA/D/100
- Decide on registration fees for the local delegates
- Decide on cancellation policy (deadline for cancellation, percentage of refund)
- Draft letters for visa purposes of invited speakers/delegates
- Correspond with web designer re. registration process
- Handle any issues during onsite registration
- Organize name tags — Event organizer to design
- Distribution of certificates of attendance

Publication committee

- Oversee designing and layout of website
- Oversee designing and printing of the second announcement
- Decide on the printer
- Printing the abstract book
 - o Design the cover page
 - o Organize the content including the messages
 - o Proof reading
 - o Oversee the process of printing
- Printing the souvenir
 - o Coordinate with Fund Raising Committee re inclusion of complimentary advertisements to sponsors
 - o Design the cover page
 - o Organize the content
 - o Proof reading
 - o Oversee the process of printing
- Printing of certificates
 - o Attendance
 - o Speakers
 - o Free papers
 - o Chairpersons
 - o Valuable contribution

Fund raising committee

- Recruit as many sponsors as possible and send official communications to them including pharmaceutical companies and other establishments i.e. Sri Lanka Promotion Bureau, Banks etc.

- Decide on major sponsors i.e. Platinum, Gold, Silver
- Decide what package to be offered with what level of sponsorship i.e. complimentary stall, advertisement etc.
- Work out approximate income from sponsors, so that budgeting can be done
- Floor plan for the sponsors

Social Events Committee

- Coordinate with venue
- Marquees for food — quotations
- Decide on all cultural performances including their requirements for sounds and lighting
- Food — menus to be decided
 - o Conference menu (plated lunch or buffet)
 - o Cocktails
 - o Sri Lankan night
- Sri Lankan Night
 - o Theme
 - o Dress code
 - o Cultural events
- City tours
- Spouse programme

Promotions (Advertising) committee

- Regularly promote conference electronically

Financial committee headed by treasurer

- Local delegates may pay cash at the organizing office
- Maintain a register

Audio Visual Committee

- Website
- Multimedia
- Count down software
- Preview
- E-posters
 - o Prevent copying of E-posters into USB drives
- Backup facilities
- Laptops (outside laptops not allowed)
- Wi-Fi zones / Internet

Phase III

- List of invitees for inauguration
- Write and deliver invitations to the inauguration at least 3 weeks prior to the event
- Get down CV from speakers

Intensive phase

- Prepare feedback forms
- Prepare list of delegates

- Proof reading of the abstract book and souvenir
- Make sure that all printing is complete 2 days before the congress
- Write and sign all certificates and sort them according to the session
- Prepare files for chairpersons
- Prepare everything necessary for the inauguration
- Pack things for each event separately to be transported to the venue
- Entrust transportation of all necessary things to the venue
- Paper advertisement
- Media conference about the event/ TV spots

Countdown clock/calendar in office magi board

- Last 14 days
- Task list for each day to be updated every morning, each accomplished task to be ticked off
- Regular briefing sessions to be held daily

Day of congress

- Signposting
- Wi fi zones, photocopying and printing facilities
- First aid corner
- Hall managers with a task list
- A list of all important contact numbers for trouble shooting purposes
- Inauguration ceremony
 - o Cloaks
 - o Awards
 - o Material for lighting of oil lamp
 - o Ceremonial procession and mace, mace bearer
 - o Compere
 - o Cultural events, lighting and sounds
 - o Escorting the chief guest

Post congress

- Make a list of attendees
- Thanking letters to speakers, sponsors, chief guest and other special invitees
- Complete and settle accounts
- Maintain website for a further period with post congress photos being uploaded and a brief message from the organizers thanking everyone who contributed to the success of the event.

We have attempted to give a clear picture of the tasks that had to be accomplished for the success of a congress of the magnitude of the SARCD, and you may observe the amount of hard work that has gone into organizing this event and the number of people who were actively involved. We take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the 8th SARCD.