

WWOM participation – what participants perceive as important

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ABSTRACT

Our objective was to identify which aspects of World Workshop on Oral Medicine (WWOM) participation were perceived as significant for participants' professional development. Online survey was sent to previous WWOM participants. Qualitative analysis of participants' responses to an open ended question was performed. Fifty two WWOM participants responded. Nearly three quarters of respondents (72.3%) felt that participation in the WWOM helped their career. A high percentage of respondents (67.3%) provided answers that fell under the domains of international collaboration, followed by personal academic benefits (48%). Overall, the results indicate that WWOM participation played important role in individual's professional development. We identified aspects of WWOM involvement that the participants perceived as important. This information will be used for the development of an objective instrument for measuring impact of WWOM on participant's professional path.

The World Workshops on Oral Medicine (WWOM) mission is to promote high professional standards in clinical care, training and research for the international community. In order to achieve this mission, a formalized process was established. The process promoted mentorship and global collaboration through the formation of working groups that included oral medicine trainees, early and mid-career oral medicine specialists, and international experts. The opportunity to work with leading experts in the field provides a unique experience for the professional development of the reviewers and assistant reviewers. This collaborative mentorship fostered through the close interactions, discussions, and exchange of ideas with senior colleagues over the months leading up to the WWOM meeting, facilitates the identification and promotion of future leaders in the specialty.

Important questions arose following WWOM VI: a) To what extent has the professional development of these reviewers been impacted by participating in a WWOM? b) What were the most significant features of WWOM attendance from participants' perspective? The aim of this report was, therefore, to identify aspects of WWOM participation that were perceived as important for participants' professional development.

This report was part of a larger survey sent to all oral medicine specialists and trainees who participated in any of the previous WWOM(s). The survey investigated WWOM topics of importance; participants' involvement in past workshops; and thoughts regarding improving future Workshops in terms of topic/participant selection, and process dynamic. However, for the purpose of this report, we focused on a single, open-ended question that specifically asked about the impact of WWOM on individual's professional path - "Please give us additional feedback on the impact or importance of this Workshop experience for you professionally". We used this type of question to allow participants to openly express what they felt was most important to them personally.

Analysis of responses was performed in three steps. First, a preliminary list of potential benefits of WWOM participation was developed by the authors (VB and PBL) with additional input from the members of the WWOM Steering committee. Second, participants' responses were independently analyzed line by line. Passages of text were categorized into specific topics that were assigned a code corresponding to one of the benefits that were developed in the previous step. Revision of the topics was continuous and allowed for moving an item from one code to another. This process continued until a consensus was reached on all topics. Moreover, in case a new, significant topic arose in participants'

answers, it was included in the benefit list and assigned a new code. The final list consisted of 17 codes which were then grouped into four domains based on intuition and rational judgment, as follows: international collaboration, personal academic benefits, clinical benefits, and other benefits (Juniper *et al*, 1997).

Fifty-two respondents answered the question of interest for this report, concerning the impact of the WWOM on their career (Table 1). The majority of the respondents (35; 67.3%) provided answers that fell under the domains of international collaboration, followed by personal academic benefits (25; 48%), clinical benefits (7; 13.5%) and other benefits (6; 11.4%).

Our results suggest that almost three quarters of participants (72.3%) felt that participation in the WWOM helped their career. Most of them perceived WWOM participation as an excellent networking opportunity and a means to establish new research collaborations. This finding is not surprising given that the purpose of professional meetings is to stimulate communication between participants, encourage the flow of ideas, and instigate joint projects. Having a strong network of collaborators with different skills and resources increases the opportunities for funding and conducting more complex research projects (Ansmann *et al*, 2014). Research has demonstrated that building strong professional networks has a positive effect on both objective (e.g., promotions, salary) and subjective indicators of career success (e.g., career satisfaction) (Forret and Dougherty, 2004; Wolff and Moser, 2009). Even though the extent to which an individual can benefit from networking largely depends on personal interests, motivation and an individual's communication skills, the majority of WWOM participants were well aware of its importance (Wolff and Moser, 2009).

The next group of benefits highly appreciated by respondents was categorized as "personal academic benefits" because the WWOM efforts were primarily directed to increasing individual academic competencies. "Participation in important academic discussions" was among the three most commonly perceived personal academic benefits. Speaking fluently in formal and informal research related conversations represent important communication skills that academics/researchers need to acquire early in their training. Despite that importance, no formal education or training on that topic is available in the majority of institutions (Cameron *et al*, 2013, 2015). Challenges for fluent professional verbal communication include difficulty in speaking a foreign language, limited professional and general vocabulary, grammatical errors, and anxiety. These challenges can be overcome by increased exposure

to academic discussions and professional meetings like WWOM provide an excellent platform for “training”, particularly for participants who come from countries where English is not the first language (Ansmann *et al*, 2014).

Participation in WWOM was also perceived as a way to improve one’s clinical skills. Involvement in the development of WWOM manuscripts created a sound appreciation for the process of contributing to the literature in an evidence-based manner as well as developing an expertise on the topic. Research shows that training in evidence-based medicine (EBM) increases an individual’s knowledge base but the impact on the practical application of EBM remains unknown (Hecht *et al*, 2016). However, clinicians who are more inclined to lifelong learning, especially those with training in research methodology, are also more inclined to learn and practice EBM (Mi and Halalau, 2016). Aside from being exposed to evidence based management guidelines, participants were often involved in formal and informal discussions on complex clinical cases with colleagues and recognized experts in the field. This involvement, in turn, may lead to a new approach in the management of these cases and result in increased confidence and more sound clinical judgement.

Among other benefits of WWOM participation, respondents emphasized the importance of the WWOM publications for the health care community. This emphasis is not surprising given that providing high quality evidence based guidelines was a major purpose for these last three Workshops. Although these reports are primarily intended for oral medicine professionals, they can be very useful for medical and other dental practitioners who manage patients with these conditions. Finally, this survey revealed that, on the basis of the experience of one of the WWOM participants, a 3-year residency training program in oral medicine was initiated in Sudan, the first such program in Africa.

There are certain limitations of this report that need to be addressed. Selection bias may exist because only 52 of 142 (36.6%) of the respondents to the survey provided an answer to the question of interest for this report. We recognize that respondents who choose to give feedback might not be representative of all WWOM participants. Nevertheless, we believe that their overwhelmingly positive responses indicate the significance WWOM had for them both professionally and personally. Furthermore this report doesn’t measure the impact of WWOM participation on professional development in a quantitative way. Our aim is to develop a questionnaire that will help gather more objective information and in order to do that, we needed to define what to measure from participants’ perspective.

In conclusion, the results presented in this report study indicate that WWOM played an important role in an individual's career and that the majority of respondents perceived their participation as a significant milestone in their professional development. Information obtained in this survey will provide a solid foundation for the development of a more sophisticated instrument to objectively measure the impact of future WWOM(s) on participants' professional path.

Conflicts of interest: none to declare

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