

Original Research

Situational Analysis of Conferences and Congresses Held in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences: 2005-2010

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Abstract

Introduction: Quality assessment of conferences and congresses and their performance seems inevitable due to the status and problems of holding them. Therefore, the aim of this study was the situational analysis of conferences and congresses held in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences during the years 2005-2010.

Methods: In this descriptive study, five checklists were designed through literature review and panel meetings of experts to assess the quality and performance of conferences and congresses held in the University during the years 2005-2010. There were a total of 40 questions in the checklists extracted from the interviews of the responsible bodies. The data were analyzed using SPSS 19.

Results: There were no statutory duties assigned to any of the committees. No indicator was used for selecting committee members. None of the conferences had been recalled at least a year prior. The university priorities had no role in organizing the conferences. Evaluation results were not available, and the conferences had very poor performance.

Conclusion: Regarding the results of this study and the importance and costs of the scientific meetings, it is necessary to revise planning, poll-making and regular evaluation of these meetings to overcome weaknesses and improve the quality of the conferences and congress in the Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

Introduction

Today, universities and higher education systems play an important role in the development of each country, but training cannot adequately solve the problems if it is based only on memorizing the material contained in books. Graduates and students must acquire the abilities of analysis and inference in the difficulties and problems of their fields of study. They must also provide appropriate research projects to get answers to the questions and solve the problems they may be faced with. Thereby, careful and proper planning between educational and educative systems can encourage faculty members and students to conduct fundamental and applied research.¹

Research is a systematic and controlled effort with a logical structure that studies phenomena and the social processes between them with the purpose of developing knowledge.² Lack of appropriate research strategies, lack of aligned research programs in universities, lack of research consistency in universities, most researchers' tendency

to clinical studies, and social and financial problems are known as the limitations in the research process.³ Recognition of the research problems in the country can be an effective step to provide research development strategy.⁴ Encouragement and creating motivation for research activities can partially compensate for the lack of research. Holding educational workshops on research methods, offering non-cash and cash awards for publishing articles and providing appropriate and supportive facilities and conditions for faculty members and students can be very useful.⁵ However, the research is valuable when its results are effectively transmitted.⁶

In the world report, "Knowledge for Better Health in 2004", it was declared that biomedical discoveries can improve the public health only if they are used to make changes, especially in the social and political fields, health systems and population groups.⁷ In recent years, several strategies

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have been used to transfer the produced knowledge and research results, including making relationships between producers and users of knowledge through networks, establishing information centers, evaluation knowledge transfer activities, and creating special structures.⁸ Holding conferences and congresses is one of the most important strategies in this regard (reference). Every year, hundreds of conferences and congresses are held around the world to transfer and share the research results.

Since holding conferences and congresses is very difficult and expensive, evaluating the quality and success of conferences is inevitable. Unfortunately, this evaluation has been neglected in our country. Tabriz University of Medical Sciences is one of the most active universities in research, and each year, several conferences and congresses are held in the university. Since there were no documented results about evaluation of process and outcomes of these meetings so far, we decided to make arrangements for holding successful and high quality conferences and congresses in the future through identifying the problems and weaknesses in the situational analysis of conferences and congresses held in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences during the years 2005-2010.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive study examined the situational analysis of conferences and congresses held in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences during the years 2005-2010. In this study, sampling was done through census. That is, in all cases, documents and information were examined. The data were collected through the checklists prepared using literature review and websites of domestic and foreign universities. The checklists were revised and finalized by eight research experts within 15 panel sessions.

The liability and validity of the checklists were examined by test-retest and content, respectively. A total of 40 questions were in the five checklists whose characteristics are as follows:

1. Structural checklist for holding conferences and congresses (7 questions)
2. Checklist about notification and registration to conferences and congresses (8 questions)
3. Checklist related to the financial states and policy of the conferences and congresses (11 questions)
4. Checklist related to the scientific/executive evaluation of the conferences and congresses (10 questions)
5. Checklist related to documentation of conferences (4 questions)

The checklists were completed by two researchers using the files and documents available in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences Research Council, documents available in the faculties, research centers and other organizations involved in conferences, and congresses and interviews with officials of conferences and congresses as well. Being ensured of the accuracy of evaluation, two assessors conducted all evaluations. Disputes were fixed and finalized with presence of evaluators, other researchers and

the officials of conferences and congresses. The necessary licenses were obtained from competent authorities for data collection. To meet ethics, the researchers promised to keep all information confidential, that is, not to mention the names of conferences and congresses and their officials in publication of the results. After extracting the data, they were analyzed by SPSS 19 using descriptive statistics.

Results

The process and quality of the 18 conferences and congresses held from 2005 to 2010 were evaluated in aforementioned University. The results of each checklist are presented in Tables 1 to 5.

Table 1 shows the standards and quality of conferences and congresses held in the University in terms of the structural standards. Accordingly, there was no documented duty for any of the committees, and no indicator has been used for the selection of committee members as well.

Table 2 indicates the quality and performance of notification and registration in conferences and congresses held in the University.

Results of Table 2 demonstrate that none of the conferences had been notified electronically and no conference was recalled at least a year prior. The map was used to determine the location of only one conference. Table 3 shows the level of financial standards and policy of the conferences and congresses. It indicates that the majority of congresses and the conferences were held on the request of departments, faculties and research centers and the needs assessment and prioritization had no role in holding conferences and congresses.

The expenses were not estimated and foreseen in any of the activities of congresses and conferences.

Table 4 shows the performance of conferences and congress in the field of scientific/executive assessment. As shown, no assessment was done on the activities of the committees and teams, academic activities such as lectures, posters and workshops.

The quality and performance of archiving documents related to conferences and congresses were presented in Table 5.

Discussion

The final goal of any health system is providing, protecting and promoting the people's health and establishing justice in this field. Research can play an important role in achieving this goal through notification and providing guidance on designing and implementing health policies and programs.⁹ Research results must be informed on time in order not to lose its effectiveness. Since the process of submission, acceptance and publication of results in scientific and research journals are sometimes long, a need is felt for strategy and a journal for publishing the results of conducted research. Holding conferences and congresses can be one of the most effective and efficient strategies for this purpose. As holding the conferences and congresses are times consuming and expensive, we need

Situation Analysis of Conferences and Congresses Held

to assess the quality of their performance and efficiency. In the present study, the results of the quality assessment of conferences and congresses held in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences showed that the conferences and congresses held had a very low quality and not even were the minimum standards considered in many cases. Overall, the performance of the holding conferences and congresses was very poor.

The results of Vanja's study on the satisfaction of the participants and the performance of the international congresses held in Novi Sad (Serbia)¹⁰ showed that most of the participants in the International Conference were well satisfied and evaluated the performance of the conferences as relatively good.

In another study by the same author, the satisfaction of participants in seminars held in Novi Sad (Serbia) had been reported as high, and the conference also achieved a high score in terms of performance,¹¹ which is inconsistent with the results of the present study.

On Weber and Chon's study, holding conferences and congresses is a good opportunity for providing continuing education, production of applied and effective ideas and opinions, and transferring research findings and technologies on time in addition to their positive social and economic impacts.¹² Thus, with regard to the capacity and opportunities created by holding conferences and

congresses, we should try to make a good use of created capacity and the opportunities for holding conferences and congresses by their proper and efficient management. One of the drawbacks of the study was the method of data collection, because the data were collected retrospectively and were taken from the available files in the archives of the deputy for research and technology of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. As the files may suffer from incomplete documentation by the subsidiary offices involved, and the executive authority for holding conferences, or even in case of documentation, the documents may not have been sent to the research deputy office or may not have been accessible at the time for whatever reason, and so the results may have been influenced by these factors. As for the fact that there was no notification or registration committee, it must be emphasized that the researchers did not manage to find any records despite their repeated checks on the files. This might confirm the aforementioned statement regarding the lack of an organized committee with a clearly defined list of responsibilities for its members, lack of documentation or no obligation to submit documents to the related offices. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was poor coordination and collaboration between the deputy for research and technology subsidiary office and executive authorities of conference. If this can be proven to be the case, it would necessitate taking action to solve the problem.

Table 1. Distribution of structural standards of conferences and congresses in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences*

Terms	The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	Terms	The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)
Determining the teams/specialized committees	6(33.3)	Documented duties	Polycymaking 0
Established teams and committees	Polycymaking 1 (5.6)		Scientific 0
	Scientific 12 (66.7)		Executive 0
	Executive 11 (61.1)		Publications 0
	Publications 0		Audiovisual 0
	Audiovisual 0		Notification 0
	Notification 2(11)		Secretariat 0
	Secretariat 0		Public relations 0
Public relations 0	Recruiting sponsors 0		
Recruiting sponsors 2 (11)		Indicators used in selecting members of Congress Academic Secretary	Scientific experience 0
Indicators for the selection of committee members and scientific secretary	0		Executive experience 0
			Specialization 0
The use of check lists and documented criteria for the selection of abstracts	0	The use of specific Indicators for selection of executive teams	0

*The figures were expressed as frequency (percentage) and in some cases there were missing cases

Table 2. Distribution of notification and registration standards of conferences and congresses in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences*

Terms		The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	Terms	The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	
Notification	Electronic	0	The congress recall includes	The conference theme topics	7(38.9)
	Non-electronic	3(16.7)		Participants qualifications	4(22.2)
	Both	15(83.3)		Date and period of the conference	11(61.1)
Electronic notification	Email	0		Registration fee	5(27.8)
	Short message	1(5.6)		Bank account number	5(27.8)
	Inserting in the site	13(72.2)		Accommodation and welfare	1(5.6)
Recalling at least one year Prior to the holding of the Congresses		0		Secretariat address	8(44.4)
Insertion of the recall at the Portal of university site		3(16.7)		Retraining score	3(16.7)
Registration	Electronic	4(22.2)		Conference location	7(38.9)
	Non-electronic	7(38.9)		Registration deadline	5(27.8)
	Both	3(16.7)		Submission format	3(16.7)
Insertion of the electronic registration form at the Portal of university site		4(22.2)		Congress site address	8(44.4)
Notification of Conference Location	Map	1(5.6)	Deadline for paper submission	8(44.4)	
	Pamphlet	0	Organizers	7(38.9)	
	None	(88.9)	How to Pay the registration fee	2(11.1)	

*The figures were expressed as frequency (percentage) and in some cases there were missing cases

Table 3. Distribution of the financial and policy making standards of conferences and congresses in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences*

Terms		The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	Terms	The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	
Decision of holding the congresses in terms of	Requirement of departments, faculties and research centers	15(83.3)	Allocated time and given budget	Before holding	8(44.4)
	Need assessment and prioritization of the university	0		During holding	0
				After holding	0
				All above	0
			Allocation of all budget to conference activities		1(5.6)
			Determining the sponsors of the conference		5(27.8)
			Defined contribution of financial sponsors		2(11.1)
The university priority of the conference based on the need assessment of the stakeholders		2(11.1)	Cost estimates in	Travel costs of invitees	0
				Conference personnel costs	0
Budget estimation based on	Executive Secretary/ holding board estimate	2(11.1)		Notification cost	0
	Approvals of research council estimate	0		Printing and reproduction costs	0
	Deputy director of research estimate	0		Training packages	0
	Others estimate	2(11.1)		Transportation	0
How to allocate the credit	At the disposal of the secretary of the Congress	0		Prizes and gifts	0
	At disposal of the Vice President for Research and Technology	6(33.3)		Dining	0
	Other	0		Accommodation	0
Determining the registration fee	Holding board	4(22.2)		Other	
	Research council	1(5.6)			
	Other	2(11.1)			0
Availability of financial report		1(5.6)			

*The figures were expressed as frequency (percentage) and in some cases there were missing cases

Table 4. Distribution of the scientific and executive assessment standards of conferences and congresses in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences*

Terms		The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	Terms	The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	
Assessment	Quality content speech	0		2(11.1)	
	Presentation method	0	Electronic	1(5.6)	
	The quality of abstracts manual	0	Non-electronic	7(38.9)	
	Quality of posters	0	Policy making	0	
	Top activities	0	Scientific	0	
Evaluation of participants	Presence	0	Certification based on specified criteria	Excutive	0
				Publications	0
Systematic use of invited speakers	Indicators for	0	Audiovisual	0	
			Notification	0	
Title of congresses and conferences	State	1(5.6)	Secretariat	0	
	Regional	1(5.6)	Public relations	0	
	International	4(22.2)	Recruiting sponsors	0	
	National	9(50)			
Compliance with title specified on the previous question	5(27.8)		Assessment of Workshops	0	
Holding the workshops along with the congresses and conferences	4(22.2)				

*The figures were expressed as frequency (percentage) and in some cases there were missing cases

Table 5. Distribution of archiving documents standards of conferences and congresses in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences*

Terms		The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	Terms	The observance rate of the numbers(percentage) (N = 18)	
Access to documents related to holding the congress and conference		9(50)	availability of official documents and records	Holding request	12(66.7)
How to archive the data	Electronic	3(16.7)		Meeting minute of committees	2(11.1)
	Non-electronic	6(33.3)		Issued rules for the secretary and members of the executive committee	6(33.3)
	Both	9(50)		Issued rules for the secretary and members of the scientific committee	1(5.6)
Availability of financial reports and cost documents related to	Conference personnel costs	1(5.6)		Meeting minutes of scientific Committee	1(5.6)
	Accommodation	1(5.6)		Certificates issued to the participants	2(11.1)
	Transportation	1(5.6)		Certificates issued to the tutors	1(5.6)
	Printing and reproduction costs	1(5.6)		Financial reports	2(11.1)
	Notification cost	1(5.6)		Registration fee receipt	1(5.6)
	Travel costs of invitees	1(5.6)		Agreements with sponsors	1(5.6)
	dining	1(5.6)	Duties of executive committee members	2(11.1)	
	training packages	1(5.6)	Duties of scientific committee members	1(5.6)	
	prizes and gifts	1(5.6)	List of topics of accepted papers	1(5.6)	
	other	1(5.6)	List of speakers	2(11.1)	

*The figures were expressed as frequency (percentage) and in some cases there were missing cases

Conclusion

The conferences and congresses held in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences were low quality and did not meet minimum standards considered in many cases, which may influence the efficiency and effectiveness of holding the conferences and congresses.

Thus, in addition to the cost and difficulties of holding such conferences and congresses, opportunities and capacities of conferences and congresses make the assessment of holding and their quality necessary. The results of this study

identified the weaknesses and problems of conferences and congresses that can be used in planning and policy making for holding future conferences and congresses.

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Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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