



## Rapid Response

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### Organising Training Events/Conferences: The Cost Effective Way

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Dear Editor,

Organizing a conference or a workshop is no child's play. As Dr Shankar has rightly pointed out, there are so many obstacles that hinder the path to a successful event.<sup>1</sup>This is especially so in the South Asian region, where hosting the event in a posh locale is considered not just a style statement but also reflects the weight that the organizing body is able to throw around. With the recent trend of pharmaceutical companies organizing lavish parties and other non-academic events at such professional meetings; and sometimes even blatantly advertising their products by means of invited guest lectures, the academic impact of such workshops and conferences is highly debatable. It is sometimes observed that the attendance at such industry sponsored events is lesser during the academic sessions and greater during the social events. During one of my personal communications with a senior colleague, who is a major critic of such industry sponsored pseudo-academic events, he tended to use the words "out-standing" delegates and "stall-warts" for the participants who tend to remain away from the medical discussions and closer to the chutzpah going on at such events.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the professional bodies are compelled to look up to the pharmaceutical companies is the prohibitive cost involved in such events. Having personally been involved with the organization of a number of international conferences that have been hosted entirely without any major external source of funding, I agree with Dr Shankar's point of view that reducing the costs of such events by utilizing novel techniques is the only acceptable solution. His suggestions are not just practical and simple to implement but also very cost effective. He has meticulously compiled a number of ways in which the expenses may be limited and I would like to add to that list from my experience:

1. Even though mementos are considered a necessary part of any event as a token of our appreciation, nothing else is comparable to a thunderous applause to express how grateful the audience is to the speaker for his time and ideas. Hence I believe, if the system of giving away these token mementos may be replaced with something less expensive, it might save a lot on costs. In fact some guests have actually expressed that they would be most happy NOT receiving any memento as some of them have such a

collection of these, and have no clue what to do with them! They can neither give them away (as they are of no use to anyone) and don't have the heart to throw them away either.

2. Local hospitals and medical colleges should be involved and requested to provide the venues and audio visual facilities as these institutions have the resources readily available for the teaching purposes.
3. Keep the duration of the workshop/conference short to limit the number of meals and lodging facilities required.
4. Time can be saved by keeping formalities, such as giving away mementoes and inaugural speeches, to the bare minimum.
5. Many guest speakers have institutional grants to attend such events or deliver lectures. Ask if these grants are available to fund their travel and accommodation to save money and administration.
6. When appropriate, use free online solutions such as Google Docs, Google Apps, Survey Monkey etc to host the website, registration portal etc for the event.
7. Lastly, for cultural activities local performing arts troupes could be invited to perform at such events. During one of the conferences hosted by us, we invited children from a special school for the differently-abled to do the invocation and a local students' band performed during one of the cultural nights. This not only provided the much needed encouragement to these students but was also extremely appreciated by the attendees.

I hope by employing these methods, educational events can be made more affordable and available to all.

Sincerely,

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#### References

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