THE UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE MODEL:

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

INTRODUCTION

The University Conference Model (UCM) has set a precedent for increasing international participation in wound education at the European Wound Management Association (EWMA) conference since its development in 2007 (Flanagan 2007). Over 300 students worldwide have successfully participated in this unique and stimulating initiative, which provides participants with additional interactive learning activities that complement the main EWMA scientific programme. Participation in the UCM has recently extended beyond Europe to students from countries as diverse as Iran, Portugal, Slovenia, the United Arab Emirates, Greece, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Iceland, Czech Republic, Taiwan, and Switzerland, and is supported by a growing number of educational institutions, including the University of Hertfordshire, the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, HUB Brussels, Danube University (Austria), and the Catholic University of Portugal.

Donau Universität Krems
Austria

Haute École de Santé
Geneva, Switzerland

HUB Brussels
Belgium

Lithuanian University of Health Sciences
Lithuania

University of Hertfordshire
United Kingdom

Universidade Católica Portuguesa
Porto, Portugal

The UCM has proven to be an immensely successful way for universities with EWMA-approved wound management courses to utilise the EWMA conference programme as a supplement to their curriculum. Following the intense 3-day EWMA 2013 conference, UCM participants engaged in a range of additional interactive online learning activities and complete a study programme developed by the course directors from their respective educational institutions. Because the study programmes varied across institutions, students participated in a variety of learning activities, including small group sessions with peers from their own institution and larger plenary sessions with participants from other institutions. Participants were actively engaged throughout the conference by attending selected sessions during the scientific programme, such as workshops, debates, plenary sessions, satellite symposia, and free paper sessions, as well as activities related to the other learning opportunities available at the conference.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

A total of 52 students from 6 universities participated in the UCM activities at the 2013 EWMA conference in Copenhagen. During the 3-day conference, UCM participants followed a programme of activities organised by the university coordinators as a supplement to the main EWMA scientific programme. Although participants are challenged to remain focused over an intense 3-day period, the concept of the UCM is considered a successful setting for learning.

This year in Copenhagen, UCM students also attended an informal pre-conference session, which provided an opportunity to discuss planned conference activities and network with other participants as well as the UCM group facilitators. This pre-conference session was specifically designed to improve networking opportunities among the participants and facilitate group cohesion. Participants were encouraged to share their best practices and compare service provisions and clinical issues from their respective countries. This pre-conference session therefore provided many participants with a unique opportunity to learn about international practices and understand the cultural context of wound management in different countries.

Madeleine Flanagan
Principal Lecturer,
Postgraduate Medicine,
University of Hertfordshire, UK.
Cordinator of the
University of Hertfordshire UCM group

For further information about EWMA UCM, please visit the Education section at www.ewma.org or contact the EWMA Secretariat at ewma@ewma.org

The UCM approach has been enthusiastically accepted by participants from all disciplines, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and podiatrists, and is flexible enough to support undergraduate students who are preparing for professional practice as well as experienced postgraduate clinicians. The participants in the UCM programme bring a wealth of professional experience, which greatly enhances the learning opportunities that are available during the conference. Most participants are experienced health professionals who specialise in wound management and value the excellent networking opportunities that the UCM programme provides. The success of the UCM programme has promoted the collaboration of inter-professional teams within a multi-cultural context and created a network of professional wound care specialists.

FACILITATING ADULT LEARNING

The teaching and learning styles implicit in the UCM are centred on the principles of adult learning that were pioneered by Knowles, which are recognised today as the values underlying modern adult educational theory (Knowles 1980). As adult learners, health professionals expect continuing education to be personalised, clinically relevant, problem-based, and self-directed (Atherton 2005). One benefit of the 'real world' environment of the

> **Although the intensity of the programme received some criticism, participants reported an overall satisfaction with the UCM activities. Feedback from participants mentioned the professional yield, network opportunities, knowledge exchange, and presentation of new information and tools as highlights. Participants also reported that the UCM provided:**
> – **inspiration to undertake a research study and submitting abstracts for future conferences."**
> – **"insights into different health care systems in Europe and viewing new innovations in products with an open but critical mind."**
> – **"a deeper understanding and appreciation for other wound care practitioners from around the world."**

EWMA conference is that the UCM enhances the participant's ability to operate as both an experienced clinician and independent learner. Although some elements of the participant's timetable is pre-determined, the programme includes significant flexibility in the choice of symposiums, workshops, and free paper session to provide the participant with a uniquely individual learning experience, which one participant says "*fits exactly with where I am currently professionally as a wound specialist*".

Students in UCM programmes consistently report that this approach enables the development of critical thinking

and creativity, which is a significant part of the learning process (Melby; Wichmann 2012). In contrast to passively accepting research findings as presented by speakers during the plenary sessions, students are encouraged to debate and challenge presenters in the UCM programme and reflect on the value of these sessions during post-session group discussions. Another advantage of the UCM learning experience is that the knowledge gained is not confined to the formal conference programme, but extends into the social events and additional activities, such as the poster judging session and the exhibition review exercise. One of the most popular sessions, which was introduced last year, is the Industry Symposia Review Exercise. This session was conducted during a plenary session with students from all participating universities and stimulated lively debate in a safe and confidential environment.

Academic staff from participating universities were available throughout the conference to support their students. In recent years, academic staff have also enjoyed working together in teaching teams to facilitate research critiquing workshops, which have been evaluated positively by participants. Students report many advantages of these teaching teams, including exposure to teachers from different countries and the opportunity to share and appreciate diverse perspectives.

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

Student feedback is a key component of the UCM, and participants are expected to submit a written critical evaluation of their learning experience. Constructive criticism from participants has enabled UCM facilitators to improve the student experience year after year. Such feedback has indicated that students particularly value the following features of the UCM:

- Meeting and sharing best practices with international colleagues
- Participating in a dynamic mix of learning activities during a major international conference
- Developing critical appraisal skills
- Experiencing the expertise of an international wound care community

In the words of one student, "*These experienced speakers presented a 'real life' view of best practice, current opinion, debate, and evidence base which was both inspiring and challenging, and reinforced my drive, motivation, and determination to develop my practice and local wound management services.*"

The intensity and pace of the learning activities can be a challenge for the students. Although the programme includes time for informal networking with peers, colleagues,

EWMA 2013 UCM group photo

and wound care experts, time constraints often limit these interactions. In addition, although most sessions are positively evaluated by students, the risk of information overload is a significant challenge for both students and UCM facilitators. The sheer volume of scheduled activities is a positive aspect of the UCM programme, but can leave students and facilitators physically and mentally exhausted by the end of the conference.

Different parts of the programme have different value to different participants. Presentation styles, language abilities, and the personal relevance of sessions influence the overall experience of the individual. However, less polished

MD Ernest Zacharevskij and MD Gediminas Samulenas, UCM participants from Lithuania at EWMA 2013 in Copenhagen:

Participating in the UCM activities was a pleasure and great experience. This was my second time participating, and each year we improve our analytical skills and, notably, learn to obtain more benefit from the conference sessions. The UCM modules help students develop an independent attitude to the information presented at the conference and critically assess innovations, new products, and recent recommendations in wound healing. I like to compare the UCM to a school where participants are educated about how to be an optimal listener.
The UCM is a great activity that accelerates our development and enriches our knowledge by filling all the gaps while remaining focused on the basics. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the UCM activities. For us, the UCM provides not only a path to advanced knowledge, but is also a great inspiration! Thank you!

presentations provide opportunities for UCM facilitators to encourage analytical comments, reflection, and debate in a confidential, relaxed, and safe atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

Students and teachers unanimously agree that the UCM is a positive and dynamic experience that maximises learning opportunities at the EWMA conference. The UCM has also provided some students with the opportunity to present in the free paper sessions, which facilitates their ability to gain confidence as active participants and establish their own expertise in wound management.

From the outset, the UCM appears to have fulfilled its ambitions to be an effective, collaborative, educational approach that demonstrates the achievements that are possible when subject specialists, academics, clinicians, and industry representatives work together to provide a unique and clinically relevant learning experience. The uniqueness of the UCM was summarized in the opening session at this year's conference in Copenhagen: *"This initiative gives EWMA an outstanding perspective as it doesn't only attract international students, but also provides them with a framework for learning".* Plans are already underway for more universities to participate in the UCM at next year's EWMA Conference in Madrid. ∎

References

Atherton J S (2005) *Learning and Teaching: Knowles' andragogy: an angle on adult learning* [On-line] UK: Available: www.learningandteaching.info/learning/knowlesa.htm

Flanagan, M. (2007): *Evaluating the pilot of the first course delivered using the EWMA University Conference Model at the EWMA Conference Glasgow, May 2007.* EWMA Journal Vol. 7, no. 3, October 2007

Knowles, M. S. (1980): *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.

Melby, B. Ø, Wichmann, S. (2012): *EWMA UCM Experience 2012.* EWMA Journal Vol. 12, no. 3, October 2012