EDITORIAL

The Australian Prehospital Emergency Health Research Forum
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Since the 1970's, the Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP), and its predecessor, The Institute of Ambulance Officers' (Australia), has conducted the pre-eminent prehospital care conference in Australia. This annual, national conference complements the College's national scientific journal "JEPHC", its national membership journal "Response" and, more recently, the ACAP Certified Ambulance Professional (CAP) program. Until 2000, a main feature of the ACAP National Conferences were the national competitions. In the lead up to the 2001 ACAP National Conference, held in Melbourne, ACAP decided to change its focus from the previous scenario type national competitions, to a more contemporary free paper competition.

At the Melbourne conference, supported by the Monash University Centre for Ambulance and Paramedic Studies (MUCAPS), the ACAP National Conference program featured a free paper competition. Abstracts were submitted and peer reviewed. Oral presentations were adjudicated to a standardised pattern by independent assessors and prizes awarded in a number of categories. The papers were generally regarded as being of a high standard and the format received much support. However, the focus on a specific free paper competition has been lost in subsequent ACAP National Conferences.

Internationally, in the USA, the "[Prehospital Care Research Forum](#)" was established by the UCLA Centre for Prehospital Care in 1992, in co-operation with JEMS Communication. This Research Forum, lead by Dr Baxter Larmon PhD, continues to be based in the [UCLA Center for Prehospital Care](#), has a national advisory board, calls for abstracts on an annual basis which are then peer reviewed, and is promoted by the Journal "[JEMS](#)". Invited papers are then presented either orally or in poster format at the subsequent "[EMS Today](#)" conference and are published in the journal "[Prehospital Emergency Care](#)", the journal of a number of national EMS associations in the USA .

In the UK, stimulated by the Prehospital Care Research Forum in the USA, a similar research forum known as the "999 EMS Research Forum" commenced seven years ago. Lead by Dr Helen Snooks, PhD, at Swansea University, the UK research forum also has a national advisory board, calls for abstracts which are peer reviewed and uses the Ambulance Service Association journal "[Ambulance](#)", to promote the research forum. Invited papers are then presented either orally or in poster format at each annual [AMBEX Conference](#), with the abstracts being published in "[Emergency Medicine Journal](#)", the Journal of the [British Association for Accident and Emergency Medicine](#) and the [Faculty of Prehospital Care of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh](#).

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In Australia, there has been no similar prehospital care research forum, although there is evidence that research in prehospital care is increasing. Two years ago, ACAP, in partnership with MUCAPS, initiated the international, free access, peer reviewed [Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care](#) (JEPHC). There are many synergies between a scientific journal, a research forum, and a national scientific conference. For example, JEPHC already publishes the abstracts presented at the ACAP National Conference and seeks to publish full papers presented at the national conference. In addition to promoting and distributing the outcomes of prehospital research conducted in Australia, the Australian Prehospital Emergency Health Research Forum seeks to strengthen the quality of both the papers presented at the ACAP National Conference, and of articles submitted to JEPHC.

It seems logical and timely therefore, that given ACAP's long history of providing national competitions in association with its national conference, in addition to; the recent trend toward a greater range of free papers, particularly from Paramedics; the trend to university education for Paramedics; the success of the free paper competition in Melbourne in 2001, and in the setting of the well established USA prehospital research forum and increasingly successful similar forum in the UK, that ACAP should continue its leadership in this field with the establishment of the **"Australian Prehospital Emergency Health Research Forum"**, to be held annually in association with ACAP's Annual National Conference.

Examination of the USA and UK Prehospital Care Research Forums, as noted above, identifies some common elements of their success:

- A focus on the prehospital phase of emergency care;
- Based at a university department of Paramedic research and education;
- A nominated convenor;
- A national advisory board;
- Promoted by a related journal;
- Open call for abstracts on an annual basis;
- Peer review of abstracts;
- Presentation either orally or in poster format;
- Standardised adjudication;
- Prizes awarded for a range of categories;
- Abstracts and full papers published in related journals.

It was with this background that the "Australian Prehospital Emergency Health Research Forum" was launched during this year's ACAP National Conference held in Canberra.

The "Australian Prehospital Emergency Health Research Forum" will be conducted, on an annual basis in association with the ACAP National Conference. It will be conducted as a partnership between ACAP and MUCAPS who will jointly develop, promote, conduct and evaluate the Research Forum.

The Research Forum will focus on Prehospital emergency health. It is suggested, given the trends both in Australia and internationally, that Prehospital care is broader than ambulance services, that the term "emergency health" is more appropriate. However, the focus will remain in the out-of-hospital sector and will include the full

scope of ambulance services, military providers, disaster situations, other providers such as general practitioners, community nurses, and first responder systems. This is a scope similar to JEPHC and also reflects the membership scope of ACAP.

The Research Forum will be guided by a management committee consisting of: two nominees of ACAP, plus the ACAP National President ex-officio; two nominees of MUCAPS, plus the MUCAPS director, ex-officio; and, the convener of the ACAP National Conference for the following year.

Given the synergies between the Research Forum and JEPHC, the members of the JEPHC Editorial Board will also act as members of the Advisory Board for the Research Forum. The national members of the JEPHC Editorial Board include representatives of all ambulance services in Australia, and of all Australian university-based paramedic education units. It is expected that the Advisory Board will assist in the task of acquiring suitably qualified peer reviewers and adjudicators for the Research Forum – a function they currently provide for JEPHC. This commonality will provide a consistent standard between the eJournal and the Research Forum.

The Research Forum will also seek to establish an effective international network with the USA Prehospital Care Research Forum, the UK 999 EMS Research Forum, and other similar national research forums. The Research Forum management committee will seek to fund the principal author of one or more of the prize winning papers to attend and present their paper at one of the research forums in the following year, and will also seek to arrange with the USA and UK research forums to enable their prize winners to present at the subsequent ACAP national conference. An in-principle agreement has already been reached to enable this international exchange to commence in 2006.

The initial objectives of the Research Forum are to:

- promote and enhance quality Australian prehospital and emergency health research, with an international perspective;
- provide a national professional forum for the presentation and debate of contemporary prehospital and emergency health research, also with an international perspective;
- establish links with similar national and international research forums and professional organizations;
- enable an Australian research author to attend and present their research at an international prehospital research forum, and to host international research authors at each ACAP National Conference;
- ensure a strong research theme at each ACAP National Conference as a feature of each conference;
- strengthen the relationships between the Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care and prehospital and emergency health research, to help ensure a reliable stream of quality articles in the journal;
- value add to the membership of ACAP.

Future objectives may include:

- facilitating research collaborations;
- developing strategies to improve and share methodological issues in Prehospital EMS research; and
- promoting research training opportunities for Prehospital EMS researchers.

Further information, including guidelines for 2006 and subsequent years, will be made progressively available on each of the ACAP, MUCAPS and JEPHC websites