



**acforum**  
associations & conference forum

# The ICCA and AC Forum **best practices for healthcare meetings**

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Creating a strategic future for international  
healthcare meetings together

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# Introduction

Re-imagining the future of healthcare meetings is a challenging task, which ICCA and AC Forum have set out to achieve through a series of events bringing together healthcare associations and other stakeholders involved in healthcare meetings. The series kicked off with the first in-person meeting on 6-8 July 2022 in Cannes, France.

This strategic relationship between ICCA and AC Forum will enhance the provision of content and networking opportunities for all stakeholders involved in healthcare meetings, whilst leveraging the strengths of each organisation to expand opportunities for engagement and knowledge sharing between association leaders and ICCA Members globally.

The event brought together influential stakeholders to discuss how we can adapt to changes after the pandemic and how to pre-empt and plan for what future audiences will need. We took a deep dive to discover how the behaviour of meeting attendees is changing. We explored how we can bridge the generation gap and create healthcare meetings for the next generation of healthcare professionals. The event also brought together c-suite representatives of major stakeholders involved in industry compliance and CME accreditation, and as such was the first session of its kind.

These best practices outline some of the key findings of a pre-event survey conducted amongst association executives and ICCA members, as well as the outcomes from the presentations and conversations at the event in Cannes.

Our thanks goes out to the city of Cannes who were the proud host of the first in-person event and generously supported the healthcare association community by sponsoring the attendance of association executives. The city of Cannes also provided an outstanding and intimate setting for stakeholders to come together in-person and explore the future of healthcare meetings.



*We are indeed very excited to embark on this new collaborative initiative between ICCA, the global community for international associations and meeting suppliers, and AC Forum, Europe's only networking platform established exclusively for and by associations. This strategic relationship will enhance the provision of content and networking opportunities for all stakeholders involved in healthcare meetings, whilst leveraging the strengths of each organization to expand opportunities for engagement and knowledge sharing between association leaders globally.*

**Senthil Gopinath - CEO, ICCA**



*This first edition of the collaborative event between AC Forum and ICCA on the future of healthcare meetings was a great success and we are proud to share the best practices for healthcare meetings. We are eager to continue the important conversations between the international associations and others in the healthcare industry. Transformation is happening and will continue in the coming years, it is up to us to follow this carefully and keep the communication going. Thanks for all joining and hope to see you again next year.*

**Carola van der Hoeff - President, AC Forum**

# Associations' current strategy for healthcare meetings

For many associations, events are still the main vehicle to disseminate knowledge and provide networking opportunities to healthcare professionals. The need to diversify the delivery methods during the pandemic has seen many associations adapting different formats, including hybrid and fully virtual, to ensure a year-round delivery of content and community engagement.

A major theme that has also come to light is the increased focus on inclusivity and accessibility, with great efforts already being made to include members across diverse career stages, as well as reaching members in underrepresented regions of the world.

Some comments include:

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*We had already started focusing on user-friendly content, thus investing in technology and IT services (live streaming, webcasts, webinars, etc.). Time, in fact, is the most precious thing for our members and users of our content (scientific & educational) and investing in tools to disseminate in a fast and efficient way our content is key. This also includes investment in HR, in particular digital marketing expertise.*

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*Our strategy when it comes to organising healthcare meetings and disseminating knowledge consists of being inclusive by providing educational activities for delegates at different stages in their careers through different pricing schemes which considers low-middle and high income countries.*

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*A blended dissemination strategy will be implemented even though the aim is not a 50/50 breakdown. The aim is to capture the audience that will never be able to afford an in-person attendance or the one, which out of convenience, would rather attend remotely instead of not attending at all.*

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# Transformative happenings

When it comes to events, a good experience alone is no longer sufficient. To make people come to your events, you should offer a transformative experience that leaves people feeling happier and healthier. In order to do so, it is important to understand the aspirations of your audience, with a strategic focus on sustainability, health and wellness. Some practical elements that can be considered for events include:

- Quiet spaces / relaxation zones
- Flexible agendas with plenty of variety and free time
- Extended packages so delegates can combine work trips with leisure/family holidays etc
- A good CSR project where people can contribute to a higher cause
- For healthcare events – involving patients for a more holistic approach to healthcare
- Co-creating content to involve all delegates and create a true community based on their needs (i.e., not your needs as the event organiser)
- Year-round engagement opportunities
- Digital access to accommodate those unable to travel or not willing to travel due to health concerns



# The latest insights into the needs and wants of the next generation of healthcare professionals

Gen Z and Millennials now generally comprise half the association member audience, yet are often still an underserved segment. Having a strategy in place to truly understand their needs and engage them in activities is crucial to ensure your organisation remains relevant and current for years to come. By skillfully using the data you most likely already have available, you can create personas to gain a greater understanding of the different audience needs. Using an experience design approach can help you focus on the needs/wants/desires of the new generation event attendees. Some practical activities to make young professionals feel valued and welcome at your events include:

- 1<sup>st</sup> timer sessions
- Dedicated meeting points in the hotel/congress centre
- Dedicated networking lounge
- Access to mentors / senior professionals for networking
- Dedicated slots in the scientific programme and actively putting young professionals in the spotlight
- Effective use of social media to maintain connection year-round

Most associations (95%) who responded to the pre-event survey indicated that they did indeed already have a dedicated community for Young Professionals, or are otherwise working on this:

*We have a future network for students and early career professionals. We also put a lot of effort into succession planning, e.g. to expand our pool of abstract reviewers by pairing several experienced reviewers with one novice reviewer. Our current congress programme committee includes an early career professional.*

*We aim to be an inclusive society able to reach members at all stages of their careers. We offer varied educational opportunities for all stages including young professionals/early career/future leaders through our basic training programs, outreach programs, beginner education courses, advanced courses, symposiums and the world congresses.*

# Transforming events into truly impactful educational experiences

Healthcare events have traditionally been a one-way transfer of knowledge. However, to ensure the best possible outcomes for patients, it is important that healthcare professionals understand how to apply the learnings. Especially at events, time should be allocated for informal learning opportunities, which happens most effectively in a face to face environment. Education needs to address unperceived needs, and the content and format in which it is delivered should be relevant to the reality the audience is facing. Practical aspects to consider to improve knowledge transfer include:

- Removing the podium or any physical barriers between the presenter / facilitator and the audience
- Q&A options throughout, not just at the end
- More time for dialogue – interactive format to apply learnings (case studies, etc.)
- More engaging presenters – live and virtual
- Avoid content dumping – recorded content is most valuable for those who did not attend, however it needs to be provided in an easy-to-digest format
- Accommodate different time zones to ensure live interaction for your entire audience
- Make sure the presenter's content is adapted to the reality of the context of the audience
- Evaluations based on more than just satisfaction levels

It's crucial to thoroughly assess the needs of your audience to identify the unperceived needs. Furthermore, the assessment should be designed to determine the level of knowledge, attitudes, challenges, gaps, barriers to change and context of your audience.

# Compliance and accreditation – how do stakeholders work together to adapt and leverage new developments

This session brought together c-suite representatives of major stakeholders involved in compliance and accreditation, and as such was the first session of its kind. The aim was to gain insight into the complex issues and to understand the perspectives of the principal protagonists. Then, we can build a common understanding of both the barriers and the opportunities presented when it comes to compliance and accreditation.

## Panelists included:

- Prof David B. Vodušek – Chair of the Permanent Experts Committee on CME, BioMedical Alliance
- Christian-Claus Roth – Co-President, International Pharmaceutical Congress Advisory Association (IPCAA)
- Eva Thalmann – Chair, Medical Education Working Group, EFPIA
- Prof Joao Grenho – Secretary-General, European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME)
- Patricia Demeulemeester – Officer, European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME)
- Ben Hainsworth – Managing Director, European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)



David, Eva, Christian-Claus, Ben, Patricia and Joao



From the pre-event survey, the following were indicated as the top challenges associations are currently experiencing with regulations around compliance and accreditation for healthcare meetings:

For associations	Mentions frequency
Compliance around involving industry sponsors/sponsored delegate	● ● ● ● ●
Accreditation process too difficult (time consuming, cumbersome, tight deadlines, switching formats between live and virtual, last minute programme changes)	● ● ● ●
Accreditation/certification in a global market	● ● ●
Cost of accreditation	● ●
Lack of clarity and inconsistencies within the compliance regulations	● ●
Sustainability and accreditation	●
Certification for online participants	●
Misalignment of compliance, regulations and accreditations across different stakeholders	●
Disconnect between accreditation bodies and what happens on the ground	●
Credibility of the accreditation	●
<b>For ICCA members</b>	<b>Mentions frequency</b>
Lack of clarity on what is considered reasonable hospitality	● ● ● ●
Staying up to date with changes in the regulations	● ● ● ●
Lack of knowledge around compliance regulations	● ● ● ●
Changes in EU compliance following Brexit	● ●
Hospitality within exhibition areas	● ●
Ability to offer services that are compliant	● ●
Difficulties comparing destinations	● ●

# Obstacles and solutions

## General

- The definition of hybrid is a challenge in itself.
- All agreed that we all need to be learner centric, to ensure high quality education is delivered with the ultimate goal to optimise patient care.
- Association representatives feel there is a disconnect between the accrediting bodies and the realities surrounding education delivery, whether through online or onsite events.
- It is important to find the right balance between acknowledging the significance and impact of an event destination rather than resorting to tourism/leisure style promotion.
- Industry support and involvement will continue to happen in the future and it is important for industry to be involved in healthcare education. The concerns are – how can this work both within the regulatory frameworks without jeopardising the quality of the education and how to develop a financially sustainable model for events.
- All stakeholders have a clear desire to maintain and improve quality of education and that forms a solid starting point for alignment, permitting rules and regulations are not established in isolation without consultation.
- Unrestricted educational grants are more challenging to obtain in today's environment.
- Associations fear that danger lies in the overlapping areas of compliance and accreditation guidelines, we need better alignment and the regulators should reduce/avoid scope creep – for example, accreditors could focus more on the educational aspects of association events and industry compliance guidelines could focus more on industry contributions to association events. It should be noted that Associations themselves are conscious and accountable for their own governance and operations – all have extensive Codes of Conduct or similar.
- The European framework is diverse and well positioned to optimise the regulatory codes and be exemplary in ensuring high quality healthcare education for the region.

# Accreditation

- Association representatives believe that accrediting the provider rather than individual events and activities could improve overall efficiency.
- UEMS said that, during the pandemic, associations had to adapt themselves quickly to different methods of education delivery. Although accreditation rules have been adjusted to some extent to address this, it has been challenging for accreditation bodies to adapt at a fast enough pace. However, change is underway.

# Compliance

- When it comes to industry compliance, the hierarchy and discrepancy between codes can cause misalignments between national, regional and global approaches.
- We should look back at the intent of the compliance codes and assess if that still makes sense in today's context – how they should be interpreted in today's reality?



Stephanie Deambrosis and Syva Palayan, European Society of Cardiology

# Concluding statements

All agreed that, unsurprisingly, open and frank face to face discussion at live events seems to be a great way to make progress on these complex issues where all stakeholders have an interest in convergence.

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*EACCME is always exploring new opportunities to enhance the accreditation of high quality scientific events and aims to do that in close collaboration with all stakeholders in this field. Only by engaging in open and constructive discussions with all parties involved will we be able to find common points of view and make valid contributions aimed at continuously improving the quality of medical education across Europe.*

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*The Medical societies are responsible providers of CME and that EACCME should profoundly change its mode of accreditation and accredit providers instead of insisting on only accrediting the provided education (events, etc.).*

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BioMed Alliance

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*There is a clear need for more and transparent exchange and collaboration.*

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*EFPIA is supportive of open discussions and transparent collaborations involving all stakeholders in the Lifelong Learning environment in Europe.*

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