



The Typhoon Conference

Yvonne R* and Hugh C

Department of Orthopedics, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Canada

Abstract

Conferences are usually well organized and run smoothly. A typhoon which struck Japan resulted in near total disruption of a previously organized conference. Yvonne's previous conference experience allowed her to rescue a meaningful event from total confusion. The experience was interesting.

Introduction

International conferences are now becoming commonplace as modern communications have greatly facilitated exchange of information. Personal contact however, remains an important adjuvant.

Background

For years now there has been considerable interest in pain, a very difficult subject. As Lord Rutherford said, 'If you cannot measure it, you know nothing about it.' Our studies have shown that all pain scales in current use are inexact as to make conclusions difficult and unreliable. Pain consists of a physical and emotional responses. For example, when you touch a hot stove, you jerk your hand away before you feel pain. Perhaps pain sensation is therefore, simply to tell one not to do that again. We have been working on a pain scale based on what the patient does, not what they say. This obviously requires additional refinement, but it is basically three levels. Type 1 is a pain complaint where no analgesics are required. Type 2 is pain complaints, with (A), occasional use of Over the Counter (OTC) analgesics, and (B) with regular use of OTC analgesics. Type 3 (A) occasional use of opiates, and (B) regular use of opiates. Clearly there are numerous subcategories, but if too many are introduced the system becomes unworkable. We hope to have some data on this shortly. Yvonne was presenting some of this early work as a keynote speaker at a conference arranged in Osaka in the Hotel Shin Conference Center on Oct 14-16, 2019.

Yvonne's Typhoon Experience

The conference was scheduled to run between October 14 and 16, 2019. The first sign of trouble was that by Oct. 3rd, I had not received a final conference program. On contacting the organizers, I got a response within the hour from the conference coordinator. I received a tentative program and was assured that my power-point presentation had been received. On debarkation at Kansai airport, 2 days before the conference was due to begin, the stewardess warned me to be careful as a typhoon was coming. When we got to the hotel, we found the TV full of dire warnings and cancellations as a result of the impending hit from a typhoon. I checked my phone and saw the coordinator asked if I had started for Japan. Her flights are cancelled as warning alert has been issued. Powerful typhoon may hit Japan on weekend, October 12 and 13. Event program remains the same. She will stay in touch. An event coordinator from Osaka will be present at the event.

We tried to sight see the next day, did not get too far, the city tour bus, some trains and all Shinkansen bullet trains were cancelled due to the typhoon. By that evening it were reported more than 1 million people in Japan had been ordered to leave their homes? The storm was 870 miles (1,400 km) wide, with wind gusts of up to 134 mph. It was gathering speed as it headed towards Tokyo, Japan. I also got a message from the coordinator, who said the moderator will not be able to attend the conference as her flight was cancelled. She also asked me to give a brief speech to open the meeting and introduce the first keynote speaker and he will introduce me.

On the day of the conference I went down at 8:00 am to register and see the conference room. I found it, and a table with a list of attendees and some name tags. There was one gentleman there, but he did not appear to be able to speak English, and could not provide any information when I asked if he was the coordinator. People began to arrive and for some reason assumed that I was in charge. As no one else was identified and I have experience with conferences, I explained that I was

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*Correspondence:

Yvonne Ramlall, Department of Orthopedics, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, 43 Wellesley St (E), Suite 318, Toronto, M4W1H1, Canada, E-mail: yvonne.ramlall@sunnybrook.ca

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supposed to be a keynote speaker, but in the absence of anyone else, I would register them. I did, adding names to the list and making up new name tags. I tried to contact the coordinator but was unable to do so. As there was no audiovisual help, I went to meet the hotel manager who came down but could not help. There was a computer, but my presentation was in Japanese, which I neither read nor speak and no one could convert to English. An attendee had brought her own computer. Fortunately, I had brought my own USB. We were able to hook her computer into the audiovisual system and as no official appeared, I got the conference started.

The first keynote speaker was not present. We found out later his flight was delayed for 35 h and he made it by the end of Day 1 filled the roles of the moderator, and first keynote speaker and proceeded with welcoming remarks and introduced the other speakers. Due to the late start we agreed not to stop for a coffee break. I was uncertain if anyone had arranged that anyway. I gave my talk last thing that morning and then we had lunch. Fortunately, lunch boxes arrived in appropriate quantities to feed all the attendees. We got through the afternoon. I was not happy and again contacted the organizers. They blamed the typhoon for flight cancellations and the fact that even many local Japanese could not get to Osaka as the bullet trains were cancelled. They told me what I already found out, that the local organizers were not too fluent in English and not very interactive. Day two was not any better. I came down at 8:30 am to find there were six presenters from Thailand but no attendees. The Thais asked me to give my talk again because they wanted to take back data to their hospitals. I consented and by the time I had done that, some attendees began to appear, so the Thais gave their talks. There was supposed to be a poster session later that morning and as there was no one there to help, I pressured my husband into putting up posters and we all helped doing so. He also took the official photographs with his own

camera. To cap it all we ran out of lunch boxes. I managed to get a second order from the hotel catering staff but we ran out again. A lady showed up and she did not introduce herself by her name but she was helping with getting lunch boxes. I found people from another conference in next auditorium, which was also poorly organized, had joined our group. I managed to get a third order but even so they ran out before my husband and I could eat. The lady went out to get more food. My husband took a final group photo at 2.30 pm, and I called it a day. On day three, I went down to our conference room but there were no attendees there. I checked with the front desk and no one could give me any information because the room was not booked. The program indicated that on Day 3, we were to have discussions over lunch between 12:30 to 14:00. I tried to contact the organizer, could not speak to her so I left a message. I waited until 12:15, no response. As I saw no one else from our conference coming by, I called it a day. I felt I had done my duty.

Conclusion

As Robert Burns said, 'the best laid schemes of mice and men'. A typhoon can certainly interfere with plans, but we made it through. This was the first time I ran a conference, essentially on my own. It was a rewarding experience and the attendees were most gracious with the "thank you" and responses to my excuses that somehow, by default, it had fallen to me to take charge. Life is full of unexpected experiences and this was one of them.

About the Authors

Yvonne Ramlall is a nurse with extensive clinical and research experience in Pain. Dr. Hugh Cameron is an orthopedic surgeon well known for his work on joint replacement. Both have collaborated for years on pain issues.