

# Lorna Stirling Travelling Scholarship Feedback Report

I am very appreciative for the support offered to me by the Lorna Stirling Travelling Scholarship. While the money offered to me as a part of the scholarship was less than half of what I had applied for when I outlined my ideas for these projects in my application, I persisted and the following was achieved:

## **1) Aiming to improve the liaison between the Australian Medical Students Association (AMSA) and International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA).**

Before embarking on the exchange, we identified the need for an ongoing link between the AMSA and IFMSA. To put it in context, IFMSA is an independent, non-governmental and non-political federation of medical students' associations throughout the world. Last year, IFMSA represented 88 countries on six continents (including Australia) and represented more than 1 million medical students worldwide. AMSA is the representative organisation for medical students in Australia. It represents the 12000 medical students pursuing their professional studies across Australia. AMSA is very active locally with medical student affairs but there has been a traditional lack of AMSA involvement with the IFMSA affairs, especially in regards to Global Health. In contrast, IFMSA Norway is a student group that seemed very active with IFMSA activities.

During my time in Norway, I explored different avenues for involvement of AMSA with IFMSA Norway. IFMSA Norway is overall very actively quite involved with IFMSA affairs worldwide, there do not run many activities based locally in Norway. Most of their programmes are based in countries outside Norway and hence IFMSA is very active in its liaison with these countries. I got the opportunity to attend a tropical medicine course when I was in Oslo. It was genuinely hard to participate in IFMSA Norway's meetings due to the huge language barrier. All the meetings and lectures were run in Norwegian.

### **Recommendations:**

- Running short courses around medical skills is a great idea. AMSA is already running courses focussed around leadership in medicine. It can further look into organising such courses in liaison with the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine for our medical students here in Australia.
- I think that language is a barrier that anyone pursuing links with IFMSA Norway in the future should be aware of.
- Sustainability is always an issue when trying to establish a new liaison. Due to certain circumstances, AMSA international representative will not be pursuing an exchange program in Oslo for semester 1, 2007. Hence any measures I would have put in place would not have continued beyond my departure since the IFMSA committee changes regularly.
- The Norwegian students are very keen to visit Australia and experience the unique aspects of rural and remote medicine. Their avenue for doing so is IFMSA or the

exchange programmes on offer by different universities. There is certainly a high demand for this experience which can be benefited by an increase in the number of exchange student places available at Australian medical schools.

**Progress:**

AMSA has since then hosted the IFMSA General Assembly meeting in March 2007 which was attended in large numbers by representatives from around the world. A lot of new ideas were generated at this meeting and it seems a plausible step for AMSA to assume the role that IFMSA plays in Norway. AMSA has also stepped up its involvement with IFMSA affairs in partner countries and is currently helping with consolidating the IFMSA framework within Australia.

Due to the language barrier in Norway, I decided to pursue a liaison with the IFMSA group located in London, England. It seemed like a logical choice (given the ease of communication, no language barriers, similar health systems etc). The meetings in London proved to be much more fruitful. I am currently compiling a full analysis (of the three pronged structure of medical student organisations in UK) for submission to AMSA.

**2) A series of discussion forums with an aim to discuss health care comparatively between Norway and Australia in the light of current issues of national importance to both countries.**

There is a large scope for knowledge sharing between the academics. The Norwegians are very good at it and currently have such programs in place with partner countries eg. South Africa. We did have quite a few discussions with the Norwegian medical students on health care issues. While these discussions were very enlightening, it did point to a need for formal avenues of such discussion to take place.

**Recommendations:**

- More formal avenues of discussion need to be put into place.
- There is interest in areas of remote health and telemedicine where a mutual partnership can be forged between Australia and Norway.

**3) Supporting the medical students on exchange at the University of Oslo.** This was an idea to make sure that students going on exchange can share certain basic necessities which are always required. I bought some items in Norway (Dooonas, lamps, blankets etc) to add to those already left by previous exchange students and these have been passed onto the next lot of incoming students. Such items are unbelievably expensive in Norway. I was able to involve the international student residence in our endeavour – although I couldn't convince them to make it a formal procedure. They have agreed to pass the items onto the next lot of exchange students and so forth

**Recommendations:**

- I would highly recommend that the University of Melbourne look into some kind of a grant for students pursuing an exchange in Scandinavia to help with such necessities.
- Follow up is required to ensure that these items are transferred onto the next group of exchange students.

**Progress:**

- Items for use by students bought in Norway.

- Items for use by students transferred onto the incoming cohort of Medical students on Exchange.

I would like to thank the Lorna Stirling Scholarship committee for the financial help with the above ventures. I look forward to keeping you updated about any progress with the above ideas in the future.

Faraz Syed