



INTERACADEMYMEDICALPANEL

Workshops on Scientific Writing for Young Scientists and Clinicians

Background

English has become the international language of education, research and computer technology. For a person who comes from another language community it can be hard to know if one is using the right words, or if you have the correct meaning for a phrase or expression. The precise presentation of scientific ideas and results is a critical component of professional success especially for young scientists. Good scientific writing can help to maximize the accuracy and impact of written documents to enhance scientific publication and fund-raising efforts. Scientific papers and books require high levels of precision and accuracy and scientists must become experts in the field of scientific writing to make their work effective.

Proposal

We propose to hold a series of workshop on scientific writing in English aimed principally at young health scientists and Clinicians from the developing world. The initial project would be conducted in Africa. Following that, regional workshops would be organized in Asia and Latin America.

Proposal elaborated by:

Dr G.B.A. Okelo, Past Secretary-General of the Africa Academy of Sciences (AAS),

Dr. Elisabeth Heseltine, trainer in science communication.

Professor G.B. de Thé, IAMP Co-Chair

Lead Academy: African Academy of Sciences

Contact person: Prof. Stephen G. Agong Executive Director, AAS

The Africa Academy of Sciences is a pan-African institution, with 150 fellows from about 40 countries, and is the umbrella organization for all the academies of science in Africa, which exist in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Africa Academy of Sciences would be responsible for this IAMP project in Africa.

The workshops

The initial project conducted in Africa foresees workshops held by region: North, South, East, West and Central.

Four types of workshop would be organized: (1) on study design; (2) on study conduct, including data collection, recording and follow-up; (3) on science communication, including writing grant proposals and progress reports and writing manuscripts for submission to journals; and (4) on journal editing.

An important component of all the workshops would be to train trainers, so that the knowledge acquired during the workshops can be perpetuated.

The participants in the workshops would be identified through the Network of African Science Academies (NASAc) by contact with medical schools and research institutions and through regional professional societies. For the editors' workshops, participants might be identified through the African Association of Science Editors, based in Nairobi, and the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications, an Oxford (UK)-based nongovernmental organization that is active in improving access to journals in Africa.

The workshop facilitators would be experienced communicators. The workshops on study design and conduct (1 and 2) could be led by persons who have taught in the highly successful courses conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (WHO), many of whom are personally known to Professor de Thé and Ms Heseltine. Other possible sources of trainers for these workshops are the

Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University. Scientists now in retirement but who spent much of their working lives in Africa could be asked to return to conduct such workshops.

The workshops on science communication could be led by members of regional editors associations, such as the African Association for Science Editors, the European Association for Science Editors and the Council of Science Editors (USA).

The workshops on journal editing could be led by the *BMJ*, which has a long history of running such workshops. Workshops on peer review, the first of which is being organized shortly by the NIH (USA) in collaboration with *JAMA* and the *American Journal of Public Health*, might form part of such training.

The aim would be to hold the first IAMP workshop in Nairobi for East Africa in 2006. The workshop would be on science communication, and the facilitator would be Ms Heseltine. If possible, a second workshop in science communication would be held in Senegal towards the end of 2006.

Financial considerations

An approximate budget for a 5-day workshop in science communication was evaluated at Euros 20 000. Formal proposals for funding should be addressed to various funding such as : the NIH Fogarty International Institute, the European Commission, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation etc. The Africa Academy of Sciences or professional medical associations would sponsor one or two participants for each workshop.

Dissemination and publicity

The workshops would be publicized through scientific societies, through the strong regional professional associations of medical specialties that exist in Africa, the NASAc newsletter and the IAMP website.

Outcomes and evaluation

The desired outcomes are: (i) raised awareness in medical schools and research institutions of the importance of including research design and conduct, and science communication in their curricula for undergraduates and post-graduates; and (ii) improved regional journals with more high-quality articles.

The evaluation should address the question of whether health, research and journals have been improved.