



## Evaluation of an international and interprofessional collaboration forum

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** International and interprofessional collaborations are increasingly becoming a core requirement for health professionals in our globalized world.

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Asia Pacific Alliance of Health Leaders (APAHL) Forum to enhance the development of international perspectives and leadership among students and faculty in the discipline of health.

**Methods:** This pilot study used a student-designed questionnaire to evaluate the views of students and faculty members about the effectiveness of APAHL in meeting its goals. Quantitative data from the scaled items on the questionnaire were analyzed by aggregating the data. Qualitative data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach.

**Results:** Study participants comprised of 22 health science (nursing and laboratory science) students and 15 faculty members. Both faculty and students agreed that APAHL was effective in leadership development of students, as well as in advancing internationalization, interprofessional collaboration, and cultural awareness among students. A clear theme among the students was acknowledgement of the importance of communication, in particular being proficient in English. Difficulties in communication were an issue for both students and faculty members.

**Conclusion:** This pilot study has shown the benefits of a student-focused international forum in developing cross-cultural awareness, and will provide the groundwork for evaluating the effectiveness of cross-cultural and interprofessional leadership forums aimed particularly at students of health.

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### 1. Introduction

The Asia Pacific Alliance of Health Leaders (APAHL) Forum was designed to provide a platform for students and academics from different countries in the Asia Pacific Region to communicate and exchange ideas on global health issues. It was established ten years ago as a way for nurturing the professional development of students in the health disciplines to become international leaders of the future. The objectives of APAHL are (i) the promotion of mutual friendship and academic exchange and (ii) leadership development of new faculty members, undergraduate students, and graduate students of health (Stone, 2013). Undergraduate courses may not effectively prepare students for leadership roles (Heller et al., 2004), with leadership defined in a broad sense as relational skills with the goal of improving health care (Curtis et al., 2011).

APAHL promotes international collaboration between students and between faculty members from Chiang Mai University (Thailand), Mahidol University (Thailand), Ewha Womans University (Korea),

University of Newcastle (Australia), Yamaguchi University (Japan), and more recently University of New England (Australia). The APAHL Forum is held annually with a focus on different health topics to encourage interprofessional and international discussions. At each forum the hosting university is responsible for organizing an agenda that incorporates the theme of the forum, through activities such as academic panel discussions, group discussions, student presentations, and excursions to health centers (e.g. hospitals and community health centers). These activities allow students and faculty members to appreciate and learn from the experience of other countries in organizing health initiatives and strategies to address specific health issues. Through comparing and contrasting the different strategies among countries, participants are able to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of their local health care system; also provided is a basis for formulating plans for future improvements. APAHL offers a forum for future health professionals to develop as leaders in addressing the following key factors: global health issues, internationalization, interprofessional collaboration, and communication. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the APAHL forum to enhance the development of international perspectives and leadership among students and faculty in the discipline of health.

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**2. Background**

*2.1. Global Health Issues*

Health is not just the absence of disease but is determined by biological, psychological and social factors (World Health Organization (WHO), 2010). Each APAHL forum focuses on current global health issues that are important for future health leaders to think about, discuss and strategize to improve health care for the future. Previous APAHL forum topics have included (i) Leadership in the era of chronic disease, (ii) Gen Y’ers as health leaders: a challenge in aging society, (iii) Evidence-based practice for health promotion, (iv) Health leadership for a global society, and (v) Global health leadership for a multicultural society. A simplified example of the program is presented in Fig. 1. When addressing a global health issue, students are guided to think about multiple factors involved in health care, including biological, psychological, socioeconomic, cultural, political, technological and environmental factors. For example, biological factors are important for health professionals to understand when working in a multicultural environment where prevalence of disease may be more common in specific ethnic groups. APAHL uniquely creates an environment where academics and students from a range of health professional backgrounds and from a number of international countries are able to convene to exchange knowledge and ideas on a focused health theme. This interprofessional and internationalized learning process encourages the development of skills necessary for health leaders, with an understanding of the impact of health issues and health care on a global scale.

*2.2. Internationalization*

Internationalization and cultural awareness are two of the key goals of APAHL. This is highlighted through forum discussions and presentations, cultural day activities, and site visits to hospital and community health care initiatives, as well as informal activities which encourage students to interact. Participants are enabled to compare and contrast differences between the host country’s health care and that of their own, and work towards identifying strategies for improving the future of health care to meet the needs of the growing population. Future health leaders should have a good understanding of the association between ethnicity, culture and health (Williams, 1997), especially

with many countries becoming more multicultural with a diverse population. For example, Australian statistics show that 26% of the population was born overseas and 46% of the population has at least one parent not born in Australia (Williams, 1997). Race can be a predictor of lifestyle behaviors and readiness to access health services, due to the cultural influences on different ethnic groups (Williams, 1997). It is considered to be one of the determinants of the variations in health which assist health professionals to identify the risk factors. Understanding patients’ social and cultural values is very important when it comes to providing holistic health care.

The future of health care requires health professionals to be able to collaborate nationally and internationally with clinicians and researchers from other countries. Unlike Japan, many Western countries have a long history of immigration and their health professionals have good cross-cultural skills (Ono and Yamamoto, 2011). Japan and Korea are two of the few industrialized countries that do not have a substantial number of international migrants (Burgess, 2007). Experience in foreign countries can be useful for health professionals, and for teaching students about international standards and protocols in health (Ozawa et al., 2005). In Japan, a new system has been started for the reception of foreign nurses through the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (Ono and Yamamoto, 2011). Such strategies are important for the Japanese Nursing Association (JNA) to work effectively with nursing associations and confederations of midwives from other countries, in order to exchange information, sponsor or participate in international conferences and workshops, and accept international trainees (Japanese Nursing Association, 2013). Correspondingly, the Australian government has set up a signature initiative known as the New Colombo Plan, which fosters the development of research and knowledge of the Indo-Pacific, by supporting Australian undergraduate students to study and undertake internships in the region. This initiative encourages close partnership between governments, universities and business. The goal of the internships and mentorships is to ensure Australian students are work-ready and have professional connections in the region (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015).

*2.3. Interprofessional Collaboration*

Interprofessional collaboration within the health care system is essential to ensure a streamlined approach to patient care, especially in the current global economy. Respect for the expertise of other health

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Welcome	Field visits	Faculty Panel discussion on “Challenges for health leaders in an aging society”	Visit to Grand Palace
Multimedia presentation by Mahidol students	Ban Bang Khae Social Welfare Development Center for Older People	Visit Wellness Center for Older People	Student presentations by School/University on innovative projects for promoting older persons’ health and wellness
An interactive introduction to traditional Thai customs	Salawan District Health Promotion Hospital	Student group discussions (mixed groups of students and faculty from each university) Group 1-2: Social welfare for older persons Group 3-4: Community care for older persons Group 5-6: Care for older persons in hospital	
Presentations by Faculty	Siriraj Hospital		
Welcome reception	Ayurved Clinic of Applied Thai Traditional Medicine		
	Evening market visit		Closing ceremony (Students from each university perform/lead a dance or cultural activity)

Fig. 1. Simplified APAHL Program.

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