

Partnership Conference

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Abstract

BACKGROUND The Duke Global Health Institute (DGHI) was founded in 2006 with a goal to foster interdisciplinary global health education and research across Duke University and Duke Medical Center. Critical to achieving this goal is the need to develop and sustain strong international partnerships.

OBJECTIVE To host a conference with multiple international partners and strengthen existing relationships.

METHODS After a deliberate year-long planning process, DGHI convened a Partnership Conference with its international partners on the Duke University campus in conjunction with its 10th Anniversary Celebration. The Partnership Conference sought to promote an exchange of novel ideas in support of global health education and research, explore new collaborations in South-South relationships, and identify and facilitate pursuit of new educational and research opportunities.

FINDINGS A total of 25 partners from 10 countries and 46 DGHI faculty members participated in the 3-day event in October 2016. Activities included workshops on preselected research topics, educational symposia on novel teaching methods and harnessing technological advances, introduction of the Health Humanities Laboratory to prepare students and trainees for fieldwork, and discussions of research infrastructure and training needs. Surveys from visiting partners revealed a high degree of satisfaction. Proposed action items include methods to realize improved communications, enhancement of mutual education opportunities, support and mentoring to build local research capacity, and more exchange of faculty and students between partnering institutions.

CONCLUSIONS With careful planning from all parties, a multilateral partnership conference including both university and medical center faculty can be a productive forum for exchange on global health education and research. Sustaining such partnerships is vital to the success of global health scholarship.

KEY WORDS academic, conference, global health, international, partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

The study of global health has attracted unprecedented interest from universities around the world, including schools of medicine. The Duke Global Health Institute (DGHI) was founded in 2006, with the goal of supporting interdisciplinary education, research, and service across both the university and the medical center. Ten years after its creation, DGHI provides academic appointments to a diverse group of 82 faculty and 110 affiliates. The educational activities of DGHI encompass course offerings and field experiences for undergraduates, graduate students,

postdoctoral fellows, and clinician researchers as Global Health Fellows. This spectrum includes more than 250 Duke undergraduates co-majoring or minoring global health, more than 70 students enrolled in a 2-year master of science in global health degree, and 15 doctoral scholars. DGHI's research program has grown to encompass 7 priority areas that reflect the global burden of disease in low- and middle-income countries.

For DGHI to achieve its goals in education and research, it must partner effectively with international academic, governmental, and nongovernmental institutions. In its current strategic plan, DGHI

established a goal to “create a robust network of international partners to exchange global health knowledge and skills.”¹ After 10 years, DGHI has categorized the most robust partnerships as priority partnership locations (PPLs). The criteria for designating a PPL include the need for a Duke faculty champion (or leader); committed partners in the PPL; the demonstration of activities in multiple sectors of education, research, and service; receipt of external funding; and a formal memorandum of understanding between DGHI and the partner institution. DGHI currently has 12 PPLs geographically dispersed across Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America (Fig. 1). In addition, DGHI is developing partnership relationships with other institutions in differing locations and has designated these sites as emerging locations (ELs).

In 2015, DGHI began preparations for the celebration of its 10th anniversary on the Duke University campus. In this context, the DGHI leadership decided to engage members from PPL and EL institutions in the celebration and to use this opportunity to further promote conversations among DGHI faculty, staff, and students and leaders from PPL and EL sites on steps that could be taken to enhance our collaborations and address challenges that had arisen. DGHI anticipated that a face-to-face meeting would offer an opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships, foster new partnerships within the network, and problem solve if impediments were interfering with successful relationships. DGHI was especially keen to promote South-South interactions in the network, such as China-Africa connections, and amplify the impact for partnering institutions. The planning process engaged each of these stakeholders. To our knowledge, this was the first partnership conference to engage faculty from across a US university and academic medical center with multiple international collaborators from different geographic regions on topics of global health education, research, and service. We describe here the methods employed to plan and execute the conference, present results of the conference, and discuss how the conference aims to strengthen the DGHI partners network. We believe that our experiences and results may be useful for enhancing other academic partnerships in global health and other topic areas.

METHODS

The process of hosting and follow-up for the conference was divided into three phases: initial concept development and planning, refinement, and execution. Each phase is described separately next.

Initial Concept Development and Planning. As noted earlier, the initial concept for the Partnership Conference was developed in October 2015, 1 year in advance of the planned 10th anniversary celebration. The process was led by the DGHI Assistant Director for International Partnerships and a Planning Committee composed of faculty champions and staff representing each of the 12 PPL sites. After an active period of deliberation, the Planning Committee agreed that the goal for the conference would be “to strengthen our partnerships in accordance with the DGHI strategic plan *to create a network of international partners to exchange global health knowledge and skills*. Powerful partnerships can foster dialogue, exchange knowledge and play an important role in building capacity in research and education.” The Conference’s 5 objectives followed logically from this goal:

1. Explore ways to expand education initiatives through more multidirectional learning, facilitating collaboration with peer learners across the network, and exploring the role of humanities in global health;
2. Identify project collaboration opportunities among like-minded partners and discuss issues related to global health research of mutual interest;
3. Offer a dedicated venue for partners to come together to share operational best practices and challenges in international research administration as they relate to project development and sustainability;
4. Explore South-South collaboration and strengthen partnerships through networking opportunities; and
5. Celebrate DGHI’s 10th anniversary through a day-long symposium that would highlight many of our collaborative projects and activities.

The desired outcomes of the Partnership Conference included an evaluation of current progress of the existing collaborative programs, identifying potential areas of mutual interest, and implementing new and strategic ways to move forward together. Logistical issues were considered, including the development of a conference budget, selection of the Partnership Conference dates in coordination with the 10th anniversary celebration, the number of invited participants from each PPL and EL institution (2 persons), and the desire to solicit PPL and EL feedback on the conference planning and agenda. The Planning Committee was instrumental in developing a strategic vision for the conference, identifying

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