

# Expectation versus Reality on Basic Research Topics in Plastic Surgery Conferences: Gap Analysis

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## Abstract Keywords

- gap analysis
- conferences
- basic research

The idea of attending conferences in our specialty is defeated if the demands are not met. Hence, the authors have tried to sum up the feedback after attending such conferences to give future organizers an insight into the same and ways to rectify the pitfalls by giving guidelines to amend them.

## Introduction

The word “Conference” comes from “confer” meaning to compare views or to counsel. A conference means a meeting involving two or more experts to discuss or exchange opinions or new information about a particular topic in any particular field. This meeting allows the exchange of ideas across generations and the globe. In effect, this meeting is a medium for teaching and hence needs to be assessed from time to time to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving its goal.

Delegates attending such conferences enroll themselves, expecting to learn new techniques with more finesse in return for their effort and time away from work, family, and expenses. They believe that their knowledge will get enhanced and eye the meeting to inspire them with new ideas and research related to their field.

Organizers of conferences need to respect these different investments of the delegates while planning such events.

Over the last few decades, due to the possibility and ease of travel across the globe and advances in audio-visual broadcasting, there is no dearth of achieving this but the main question is whether we can achieve the objective of holding such events.

Hence, in this article, we perform a gap analysis of conferences on plastic surgery and related fields and reflect on our interpretation using Gibbs's reflective cycle that include: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action plan.<sup>1</sup>

## Description

Conferences are meant to give you a new ideas that will inspire you to carry out some new work clinically as well as in research. Many of our research projects have come up by attending such events. But of late, we feel this exchange of ideas seems to have come down. Academic institutes require their faculty to be involved in research, clinical and teaching practice in equal proportions as the educational committees have recognized a lacuna in basic research in most of the teaching hospitals. So, at the end of attending these conferences, we felt the purpose of attending such events gets defeated as new research ideas are not presented as much. We also feel that certain important topics are sidelined to smaller halls catering to a small population of delegates.

## Feelings

As enthusiastic delegates of conferences, surgeons have expectations of seeing good work being exhibited and at the same time their good work being recognized.<sup>2</sup> They feel that new and innovative work should be acknowledged regardless of the presenter and there can be no better platform than a scientific conference filled with educated minds. But there are occasions when they get disappointed due to a lack of peer recognition.

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## Evaluation

The good part of these sessions is that the audio-visual content is well taken into consideration and credit goes to today's technology. Multiple plenary halls are well planned to accommodate the huge audience and wider range of topics of our specialty. Experts from different fields, both national and international, are part of the faculty to give weightage to the different subspecialties.

But somehow basic research topics are grossly neglected. One important reason for this maybe, while some clinicians are overwhelmed with clinical work, others think that these types of studies are normally conducted by specialists in the preclinical field. There is also another part of this population who despite understanding the importance of such research is unable to conduct such studies due to the lack of satisfying infrastructure. They may also feel that the language used in basic research is beyond the understanding and interests of the audience attending such conferences. To combat these issues, presenters showcasing basic research work should deliver their results in a simple yet effective way and show the clinical translations as a result of them. From the organizer's point of view, to avoid neglect of these topics they may encourage mandatory presentations of one to two basic research topics in each session to gradually introduce their importance to the delegates.

The assessments of conference topics also expose a need for collaborative work between basic and clinical research in addition to dearth of basic research. Researchers in our field are looking for such opportunities. There should be an attempt to provide the missing links between basic research to clinical translation and in cases of newer equipment or models with intellectual properties, avenues to commercialize them too through these meetings. Sessions on grant writing, the process of patent filing, and topics on conducting effective research also need to be addressed through these meetings more effectively. This problem can be remedied by conducting workshops alongside conferences involving researchers from other bodies like Council of Scientific and Industrial Research or Indian Council of Medical Research who are experts in research methodologies and conversant with grants and patents. A preconference survey to assess the number of delegates interested in such topics can be done and group interactions with the experts can be organized to benefit them as part of these conferences.

Experts who attempt to present their work come prepared to show their audience what difference their research can bring about in our specialty and in the end get disappointed if their work is not presented to the audience it is meant to be. To avoid this the delegates presenting such a study should highlight the importance of their research in the abstract that seems to be the screening point to determine their selection and delegation to different halls. More interest can be created by including relevant figures and clinical pictures. It is also important for the abstract to highlight the clinical translation of their research that is ultimately what a clinician is looking forward to culminating from research in their field. It is also equally important for the

organizers to understand the relevance and significance of such work and make sure to delegate them in those halls which can reach a wider audience. These needs and gaps can be addressed only if the organizers and basic researchers work hand in hand. The distribution of talks should also be evenly spread between plenary and parallel halls based on and clinical research topics.

## Analysis

The connections and networking the organizing committee has with the experts in our field both nationally and internationally have helped them in delivering a feast of impressive clinical work in the different subspecialties. But the lack of basic research in these conferences is due to the lack of the inputs to include them and give them their due importance. One of the reasons why a relevant topic does not make it to the main halls but rather a smaller parallel one is the probability of organizers' bias or rather the lack of it toward the speaker. There also is the issue of audience members being unable to voice out their opinions toward a presentation though realizing the importance of the topic or study, to prevent being different from the dominant decision of the group. This is recognized as "Group thinking"<sup>3</sup> and needs to be addressed. The office bearers of the association organizing the conference should be made aware of the complaints and issues identified above during the general body meetings of the association. Letters must be written to the president and secretary about these issues so that solutions can be devised and these issues be addressed.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we feel that there lies a communication gap between the attendees and the conference organizers and hence there should be some means to identify and ridge them. This publication related to feedback on conferences is intended to raise awareness of the importance of basic research both among the conference organizers and the attending delegates. Few of the conferences do recognize basic research by awarding them. These strategies can be popularized to a greater extent. We leave the action plan to the conference committees and the general body of these esteemed societies to help bridge these gaps and improve the effectiveness of such scientific meetings.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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