

Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research
WHO Collaborating Centre in Education and Research in
Human Reproduction

Activity report

1 January 2006 - 31 December 2006

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WHO Collaborating Centre in Education and Research in Human Reproduction

The Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research is a [WHO Collaborating Centre in Education and Research in Human Reproduction](#). The activities carried out include the provision of postgraduate training courses in clinical research in reproductive and sexual health; the development and conduct of research and research synthesis and the provision of expertise to WHO or to centres of WHO's network requesting collaboration in research, research training or clinical aspects in human reproduction.

WEBSITE

The GFMER website is extensive, regularly updated and provides easy access to useful information. The website ([Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research](#)) contains the following:

- Languages
 - English, French, Italian, German, Spanish
- Foundation
 - Information about the mission, objectives and structure of the Foundation
- Search
 - Site and Web search
- Education
 - The postgraduate and continuing education programs of the Foundation
- Partners
 - International collaborations, Foundation's partners
- Publications
 - Publications, presentations, books and atlases
- Databases, links
 - Collection of links to free medical journals, medical schools, dictionaries, search engines, medical images, guidelines and free full text articles
- Navigation
 - Sitemap, list of files in alphabetical order, useful downloads.

The website has an average of about 15000 visits and 170000 hits per day (see: [Usage Statistics for gfmer.ch](#)).

SERVICES OFFERED BY THE FOUNDATION

GFMER with its pool of experts provides assistance at all levels of [epidemiological research and research training](#). The spectrum of activities ranges from training in research to research implementation, research synthesis and guideline development to research management by using up-to-date tools and skills.

DEGREE COURSES

1. Postgraduate Research Training Course: 20 February - 29 March 2006

Thirty-four participants from 24 different nations attended the 2006 Training Course in Research in Reproductive Health/ Sexual Health. This 6-weeks annual course has been established in 1991 and is jointly conducted with the Department for Reproductive Health and Research, World Health Organization (RHR/[WHO](#)), the International association for Maternal and Neonatal Health ([IAMANEH](#)) and the Fonds Universitaire Maurice Chalumeau ([FUMC](#)). See [Training in Reproductive Health Research - Geneva 2006 - Lecture plan](#) and [Training in Sexual Health Research - Geneva 2006 - Lecture plan](#).

2. Advanced Methods in Epidemiology: History and Concepts: 3-5 January 2006 organized in collaboration with the [Inter-University Postgraduate Programme in Public Health of the Swiss-German Universities](#). See [Advanced Methods in Epidemiology: History and Concepts - Geneva 2006](#).

Twelve participants took part in the 3 day course, as part of the Swiss Interuniversity Programme in Public Health.

Lectures were held at WHO by Prof A Morabia, Department of Clinical Epidemiology, University of Geneva and Prof Sharon Schwartz, Columbia University, New York.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH - THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE FOUNDATION

GFMER hosts the editorial seat of the specialist journal [Reproductive Health](#). In 2006, 33 submitted manuscripts underwent peer review which resulted in 11 publications. Most of the published articles originated from low-resource settings. [Reproductive Health](#) is an open-access, peer-reviewed, Medline-indexed, online specialist journal, with its content freely and universally available. GFMER aims to encourage especially researchers from low - and middle income settings to submit their research findings and making them available to a wider audience. The [submission](#) and peer review process are electronically, thus allowing swifter publication.

INFORMATICS

For the dissemination of the postgraduate courses local expertise and assistance to distant colleagues for the use of online video conferencing was provided. A combination of technologies such as Messengers (of MSN and Yahoo), Netmeeting and VoIP (voice over IP) via Skype and SIPphone was applied for establishing communication. We continue to investigate ways to record & archive the video conferences in order to provide access to interested people accessing the foundation website. Participants in the postgraduate courses experienced learning sessions with hands-on use of these technologies. As in previous years, basic instruction on classical informatics applications (Word, Excel, Powerpoint) was given. Other new technologies such as VPNs (virtual private network) were also included in the course material for the first time.

The number of streaming videos available on the website has been augmented and expertise in converting to and from the more modern 'Flash' (FLV) format was developed. Website statistics continue to tell us that that our efforts to provide long-run video with

low-bandwidth are appreciated by visitors to the site. The user-group of medical informatics experts ([MicTEG](#)) with the goal of disseminating information about informatics solutions used by GFMER has been formed and enlarged with more members. The [E-Learning tools](#) (course-management system) have been put to use in order to stimulate discussion related to different topics (in addition to the previously configured online collaboration areas). A new forum area was created and adapted for GFMER activities and as a demonstration application for attracting collaborators who may wish to create topic-specific forum areas.

Our experiences with the GFMER web-based application for [internet based clinical trials](#) (IBCT) has allowed us to identify further functionality to better correspond to the needs of the users. The development of the application has been incorporated into the software versioning system and some preliminary investigation into the inclusion of digital-pen based data entry has been made. The application has gained in robustness, with the inclusion of new alternate backup strategies, data-consistency trackers & markers, and error-catching for connectivity issues. Initial efforts to create a demonstration area with an artificial database were undertaken. Some preliminary tests to incorporate the new AJAX technologies were made in order to stay competitive with other products available on the market. An effort to provide SPSS format data export was looked into and is still under study. Much investment was under-taken to stimulate user participation to contribute their own data in the undergoing collaborations (e.g., the Laparoscopy and Obstetric Fistula projects).

The online Encyclopaedia of medical images has been modified to allow a greater number of images to be stored and provided to internet users (see [Developmental and genetic diseases](#) and [Selected medical images](#)). A new generic method for quickly developing dynamic databases using Excel, is under study.

The list of currently ongoing online medical database projects are:

- Misoprostol for the treatment of primary postpartum haemorrhage, Gynuity Health Projects, New York
- Misoprostol project A35042, WHO, Switzerland
- Obstetric Fistula, C-H Rochat, Geneva, Switzerland
- Robotic Laparoscopic Prostatectomy, EGRU, Geneva, Switzerland
- Hepatitis Cohort Study, FValse, Saigon, Vietnam

CLINICAL TRAINING, RESEARCH AND GUIDELINES

1. Publications

See [Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research - Publications, presentations](#) for an up-to-date list of publications from members of the Foundation.

2. Research and Research Synthesis Activities

- **Progestogen containing implantable contraceptives.** Application to the WHO essential medicines list (accepted for inclusion March 2007)
- **Leonardo da Vinci project - vocational teaching in Europe:** A pilot project supported by the European Union to harmonise postgraduate medical education by using e-learning tools and integrated teaching. The project involves 11 partners throughout Europe. Birmingham University is the lead partner in this project.
A cluster randomised trial to test the knowledge gain of the newly developed course compared to standard teaching will start in April 2007 in different partner countries.

3. Prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula (Prof C-H Rochat)

GFMER is a partner in the UNFPA/WHO '[Campaign to end fistula](#)'. The aim is to create a 'Centre of Excellence for the prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula in Northern Benin, which would serve other countries in the region under the name the "Tanguieta Model". This programme is supported by the Ville de Genève, Esperanza Foundation, Ambra Foundation and private donators, and is conducted in collaboration with WHO and UNFPA.

The aims of the project are:

- Training local specialists in fistula repair
- Raising awareness about prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula
- Development of research programs

In 2006, the "Tanguieta Model" was extended to the following centres: Fada N'gourma - Burkina Faso, Maroua - Cameroon, Conakry and Kissidougou - Guinea. The following [activities](#) were carried out:

- Three missions to St Jean de Dieu Hospital, two in Maroua, one in Fada N'gourma and five in Conakry and Kissidougou, during which 215 women underwent fistula repair and local doctors were trained in fistula surgery.
- Development of an internet based obstetric fistula database.

4. Robotically assisted laparoscopic surgery (Prof C-H Rochat)

Following the [European Robotic Urology Symposium](#), the European Group for Robotic Surgery ([EGRU](#)) was founded and is hosted at the Foundation. The following [activities](#) were carried out:

- Participation in courses and conferences
- Development of an internet based robotic laparoscopic surgery database

5. Training and Research Program in laparoscopic surgery (PD Dr P Meyer)

The overall aim of this program is to improve health care in developing countries. There is still a major gap in the implementation of modern surgical methods in resource-constrained settings, often due to limited availability or access of the equipment and lack of training. In 2003, the GFMER has begun collaboration with the WHO/Department of Essential Health Technologies and Department of Reproductive Health and Research in order to support the increased use of laparoscopy in a number of partner institutions in resource-constrained countries.

Following the agreement signed between GFMER and the City Clinical Oncological Dispensary of St. Petersburg in December 2005 and January 2006, a [Training Course for Advanced Oncologic Laparoscopy](#) was organized from 6 to 17 February 2006 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

6. Franco-Vietnamese Association for Liver studies and Education - FValse (Dr J Bengoa, Dr PJ Malé, Dr J Petit, Dr Huy, Prof F Negro)

The aim of the [FValse - Franco Vietnamese Association for Liver Studies and Education](#) programme is to assist health care professionals in Vietnam on the prevention and treatment of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C and to provide education programme for health care professionals in this field.

A meeting between members of FValse, GFMER, WHO and other interested parties was held at WHO in December 2005 to setup a [study on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B](#) was held.

7. "Art for Health" Project

- After a [meeting](#) held in WHO Headquarters in March, a collaboration was established between GFMER and WHO/RHR to launch the "[Art for Health](#)" project, which aims to increase awareness of and promote action towards the improvement of women's reproductive health conditions around the world. The project director is Prof Willy Pasini. See also [Merialdi M, Requejo JA, Campana A: Art for Health Project Team. Art for women's health. Lancet. 2006 Dec 16;368\(9553\):2113-4.](#)

8. Laos Project (Mr. Y. Ebinger - Project Coordinator)

The overall objectives of the project ([Projets pour l'Enseignement et la Recherche au Laos](#)) are to:

- Furnish health education programmes and research support
- Establish collaboration between entities from the public and private sectors
- Develop international partnerships and twinning programmes with collaborating institutions and develop a programme for staff exchange

The GFMER collaboration project will increase the accessibility of state-of-the-art relevant domain of post graduate medical knowledge, in terms of training, research support, knowledge bases (methodology and data) and scientific information availability and dissemination.

The Mother-and-Child-Health and Reproductive Health domains are the first priority for the Lao PDR Public Health Institute for the next five years.

In agreement with the Lao PDR Health Ministry, the Vientiane Faculty of Medical Sciences and various Laotian healthcare institutions, a cooperation programme has been initiated and formally approved in November 2006 by all participating partners. The first phase of this programme will require financing over three years.

Partners involved

- Lao PDR Ministry of Health, Vientiane
- Faculty of Medical Sciences, Vientiane
- National Institute for Public Health, Vientiane
- Institut de la Francophonie pour la Médecine Tropicale, Vientiane
- National Centre for Children and Mother Health, Vientiane

Activities in 2006

- Classification of the relevant domains where the needs are identified.
- Budget evaluation and breakdown.
- WHO collaboration to identify strategic aspects.
- Meetings with project stakeholders
- Formal agreement negotiation and approval (Vientiane November 2006)
- Planning, design and project management.

MEETINGS

Foundation Council Meetings

Meetings were held on a regular basis (23 February, 27 April, 16 June, 7 September, 23 September and 13 December)

Meetings attended at WHO

- January 2006 - 115th WHO Executive Board Session (representing FIGO)
- May 2006 - World Health Assembly (representing FIGO)
- May 2006 - 116th WHO Executive Board Session (representing FIGO)
- Copper containing IUDs for contraception. A technical meeting on norms and standards (consultant for the WHO expert working group)
- July-December 2006: EU EBM Unity meetings in Milan, Dublin, Basel and Birmingham

PARTNERSHIPS

See [Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research - International activities and collaborations](#) and [Fondation Genevoise pour la Formation et la Recherche Médicales - Activités et collaborations internationales](#).

The following associations work in close collaboration with GFMER and have their headquarters at the Foundation:

- [European Group of Robotic Urology / Groupe Européen de Robotique en Urologie](#)
- [Fonds Universitaire Maurice Chalumeau](#)
- [FValse - Franco Vietnamese Association for Liver Studies and Education](#)
- [International Association for Maternal and Neonatal Health \(IAMANEH\)](#)
- [San Raffaele del Monte Tabor Foundation - Geneva Office](#)

Foundation membership

Health professionals interested in collaborating with GFMER can [apply for membership](#). Benefits of becoming a member:

- Being part of the Foundations' international network
- Receiving assistance for research training activities
- Publishing on the website of the Foundation:
 - Institutional and/or personal page
 - Scientific presentations
- Possibility of free of charge publications in peer reviewed journals

Duties:

- To support the Foundation in its activities:
 - In clinical research training
 - In the dissemination of knowledge and good quality medical information by the website of the Foundation

FORTHCOMING ISSUES

1. [Research Training Course in Reproductive Health \(26 February - 28 March 2007\)](#)

Organized in collaboration with the UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank Special Program for Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, Family and Community Health Cluster, and the International Association of Maternal and Neonatal Health (IAMANEH).

2. [Research Training Course in Sexual Health \(26 February - 28 March 2007\)](#)

Organized in collaboration with the Fonds Universitaire Maurice Chalumeau and the UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank Special Program for Research, Development and

Research Training in Human Reproduction, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, Family and Community Health Cluster.