

## Exchanging information and experiences through regional professional forums

Andrei Issakov lauds progress being made by those responsible for health facilities and technology in setting up national and regional associations



Professional associations are powerful vehicles for promoting the status of profession by providing a better heard collective voice, supporting members in knowledge generation and exchange of best practices and helpful tools, and orchestrating opportunities for communication, networking, lifelong learning, face-to-face discussions, and collaboration.

For the profession of healthcare engineering, often neglected in developing countries, the pivotal role of professional societies could hardly be overestimated. In addition to the well established South African Federation of Hospital Engineering (SAFHE) and Clinical Engineering Association of South Africa (CEASA), only few countries in Africa succeeded in bringing together into organised professional groupings those who work with infrastructure and technology in health systems either keeping it functional, using it for patient care, or taking decisions on its acquisition – engineers, technicians, nurses, physicians, and managers.

The nucleus of an exemplary action lies in East Africa. The Association of Medical Engineering of Kenya (AMEK) and Uganda National Association for Medical and Hospital Engineering (UNAMHE) have become important players on a national scene helping to convene the profession, raising its profile and legitimacy, and providing capacity building opportunities to its members. They have also assumed the sub-regional leadership role, striving to provide the forum for collaboration, networking, and capacity building for colleagues from other East African countries who have yet to form their national associations. For these, they have successfully mobilised technical and financial support from the International Federation of Hospital Engineering (IFHE), International Federation for Medical and Biological Engineering (IFMBE), American College of Clinical Engineering (ACCE), SAFHE, and WHO. Within these efforts, Tanzania has just created its Association of Medical Engineering (TAME), being now registered as a

legal entity.

On 8–10 December 2010, UNAMHE and AMEK co-hosted in Kampala the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial East African Healthcare Engineering Conference under the theme 'Towards Better Planning and Management of Health Infrastructure in East Africa' (the first one was held in August 2008 in Kisumu). The Conference attracted participants from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, as well as Cameroon, South Africa, and UK. It dealt with a range of issues from the sustainable design of health facilities, waste management, infection control, healthcare equipment management, human resource development, medical device regulation, to health technology evaluation and evidence-based policy. It thus addressed many of the challenges emphasised in the opening speech by the Ministry's of Health Director of Clinical Services, Dr Amandua, who said that the shortage of engineers seriously affects healthcare quality, and the future of health services depends on strengthening of engineering in the health sector.

IFHE has recently developed an initiative to support national societies in East Africa by sponsoring their selected members to attend the biennial SAFHE/CEASA conferences, the flagship event for those involved in the provision of healthcare facilities and services in Southern Africa and beyond, and training programmes specifically organised in conjunction with this event. The first such experience at the 18<sup>th</sup> Conference held in May 2009 in Cape Town proved to be highly successful, and next month, another group from East Africa will benefit from this initiative.

On 6–8 April 2011, SAFHE and CEASA organise their 19<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference in Johannesburg under the theme 'More for Less: Healthcare Delivery in a Resource Constrained Environment'. The conference will provide a balanced mix of speakers from the private and public sectors stimulating challenging debates on key issues of health systems infrastructure, technology and health service delivery ([http://www.ceasa-national.org.za/downloads/SAFHE-CEASA\\_2011\\_programme.pdf](http://www.ceasa-national.org.za/downloads/SAFHE-CEASA_2011_programme.pdf)). It is definitely worth attending for health services and facilities planners, administrators and managers, hospital architects, medical equipment suppliers, hospital and clinical engineers and technicians, and other health professionals.

---

Dr Andrei Issakov is Director of Health Systems and Technology International Consulting (HS&T), a Swiss firm based in Geneva, and Executive Secretary of the Health Technology Task Group of the International Union for Physical and Engineering Sciences in Medicine (IUPESM-HTTG).