

Why do we Update?



It is generally accepted that knowledge ages rapidly. This is true for medicine (as far back as the days of Osler – and in fact the days of Hippocrates) and for literally every other discipline. The practitioner who does not keep his or her knowledge up to date may therefore soon lack current factual knowledge. Developments in the field of medicine are so rapid that this situation will soon become hazardous to both patient and practitioner. The counter-argument, that experience leads to better understanding and that applied knowledge is in any case what is important, does not totally hold water. Experiential learning takes place in the context of a factual background that has to be maintained.

Adults learn differently from younger people. An amazing aspect of memory is that facts mastered and buried long ago can resurface with appropriate triggering. To repeat known information in classic 'lecture style' will soon bore the audience. To contextualise information, to be interpretive, make the audience pay attention. To be participatory is often even more important.

With this as background it is proper to reflect on the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Update, a joint venture between the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and the North-Gauteng branch of the South African Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (SASOG). For about 15 years this Update has been presented every second year to ever-growing audiences. The format has been kept relatively static: three overseas speakers speaking often, some national and local speakers, all presentations to be contextualised, and plenty of time for discussion, social contact and opportunities to interact with the pharmaceutical, equipment and information trade. Update has always received massive trade support, as the format of the meeting ensures that the delegates and the trade representatives intermingle at every opportunity. The permanent venue for Update

is the CSIR Conference Centre. The three international speakers for 2009 are of the highest calibre, and well known both as speakers and as medical scientists.

Update acknowledges the value of reminding colleagues about ethical issues. This year continues the practice, but has one novel addition: special sessions sponsored by the Medical Protection Society that will take place in workshop format as well as a session during the Update. These sessions are presented in the firm belief that specific targeted training may greatly assist in decreasing the number of claims against doctors as well as in improving practice.

Finally, Update is a host for meetings of subspecialty groups under SASOG. For the second time the Maternal and Fetal Society and the Gynaecological Oncology Society will present half-day workshops as open academic meetings on the day before Update begins. Colleagues are welcome to attend these meetings.

The biggest difference between Update and a congress is that Update offers opportunities for contextual reflection and interpretive opinions on current practice as well as predictions for future developments. Clearly this is based on the presenters' own and on overall research. While congresses also often have these features, congresses have to present new research data to the peers. Update therefore has no free communication sessions or parallel sessions.

Update is an important cog in the wheel of continuing training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and long may it live to perform this essential function! Thanks to all the delegates attending – please do so in future as well.

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