

International Federation of Medical Students' Associations

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) is an independent, non-governmental and non-political federation of medical students' associations throughout the world. In 2002-2003 IFMSA has 93 members, National Member Organizations, in 89 countries on six continents and represented over 2 million medical students worldwide.

The IFMSA was founded in May 1951 and is run for and by medical students on a non-profit basis. It is officially recognized as a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) within the United Nations' system and recognized by the World Health Organization as the international forum for medical students. It exists to serve medical students all over the world. IFMSA was established in the Netherlands as a charity organization.

Mission Statement

"Our mission is to offer future physicians a comprehensive introduction to global health issues. Through our programming and opportunities, we develop culturally sensitive students of medicine, intent on influencing the trans-national inequalities that shape the health of our planet."

Aims

- To be a forum for medical students throughout the world to discuss topics related to health, education and medicine, to formulate policies from such discussions and to carry out appropriate activities
- To promote humanitarian ideals and medical ethics amongst medical students
- To act as a mechanism for medical students' professional and scientific exchange and projects
- To be a body through which co-operation and contacts with other international organisations are established;
- To act as a mechanism for member organisations to raise funds for projects recognised by the IFMSA.

Objectives

The goal of the federation is to serve society and medical students all over the world through its member organisations by:

- Empowering medical students in using their knowledge and capacities for the benefit of society.
- Providing a forum for medical students throughout the world to discuss topics related to individual and community health, education and science and to formulate policies from such discussions.
- Promoting and facilitating professional and scientific exchanges as well as projects and extracurricular trainings for medical students, thereby sensitising them to other cultures and societies and their health problems.
- Providing a link between members, medical students' associations and international organisations, and to encourage the co-operation between them for the ultimate benefit of society.

Standing Committees

All activities of the IFMSA are linked to one of the six following Standing Committees (SCs):

- Standing Committee on Medical Education (SCOME)
- Standing Committee on Professional Exchange (SCOPE)
- Standing Committee on Public Health (SCOPH)
- Standing Committee on Reproductive Health and AIDS (SCORA)
- Standing Committee on Research Exchange (SCORE)
- Standing Committee on Refugees and Peace (SCORP)

Standing Committee on Medical Education (SCOME) is a forum for the debate of the medical education. Experience and knowledge is exchanged to allow dissemination of the new educational methods.

Standing Committee on Professional Exchange (SCOPE) co-ordinates the international exchange of medical students within foreign hospitals providing opportunities to experience the health care system and culture of other countries.

Standing Committee on Public Health (SCOPH) is a forum for public health projects. There are currently projects e.g. in Sudan, Mexico, Romania and India. National and local activities include vaccination programs and sexual education.

Standing Committee on Reproductive Health and AIDS (SCORA) strives to enhance and extend knowledge of family planning and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases to medical students. This knowledge is used in planning local information campaigns.

Standing Committee on Research Exchange (SCORE) co-ordinates international research exchange. The medical students are involved in research projects of 3-6 months durations.

Standing Committee on Refugees and Peace (SCORP) co-ordinates the health care projects in refugee camps allowing medical students to aid, learn and experience the problems faced in areas of disaster. At the local level public awareness is sought through the information campaigns focusing upon issues such as human rights and the problems faced by refugees.

The Standing Committees are represented internationally, nationally and locally, and focus on areas of permanent interest to IFMSA.

Membership

IFMSA activities are organized by medical students for medical students throughout the world. The activities are initiated often in the students' own community at local or national level. Afterwards the ideas and experiences of the organizers are brought down to the international level where they are discussed with the fellow medical students from other countries. On the international level ideas and experiences are exchanged so that they can be brought home up to the local level.

The federation is composed of members (<http://www.ifmsa.org/members/index.html>): full members, candidate members, associate members and honorary life members.

Structure

IFMSA has created an organizational structure which facilitates the flow of ideas and enables the development of activities.

IFMSA is composed of medical students' associations from 89 different countries, which are the members of IFMSA and are called National Member Organizations (NMO's). All the activities of IFMSA are organized by the NMO's. Each NMO has its own identity. Most NMO's have Local Committees at the medical schools in their country. The Local Committees coordinate and organize IFMSA activities at the local level. Through these Local Committees the NMO's are in direct contact with the medical students.

IFMSA is a federation which respects the autonomy of its members, the NMO's. The NMO's can decide themselves which activities they take part in and what new activities should be developed.

The international framework of IFMSA

The decision making power is in the hands of the General Assembly, the executive power is in the hands of the International Board and the controlling power is in the hands of the Supervising Council.

The **General Assembly** (GA) is composed of representatives of all NMO's. The General Assembly meets twice a year in March and August. The General Assembly decides about the activities of IFMSA, the regulations, the management and elects the International Board and the Supervising Council.

The **International Board** is elected each year by the General Assembly. It is composed of the Executive Board and Directors. The **Executive Board** is responsible for the daily management of the federation and deals with issues as fundraising, marketing, external relations, finances, administration, development and support to NMO's.

There are two types of Directors, **Standing Committee Directors** and **Support Division Directors**. Standing Committee Directors are assigned to one field of activities. They coordinate the Standing Committee which carries out these activities. They give support to national and local officers, prepare the meetings of the Standing Committee and are responsible for development of new activities. Support Division Directors are responsible for general activities which are important for all other activities. IFMSA has support divisions for projects, publications, training, new technologies (internet) and Alumni Relations.

To help the elected officials the Executive Board can appoint **Liaison Officers**. They maintain the contacts with important external relations and represent IFMSA towards those organizations.

The **Supervising Council** is elected by the General Assembly to evaluate and supervise the work of the IFMSA officials and undertake actions in the case problems arise.

Fields of activities

Since its foundation in 1951, IFMSA has existed as a forum for initiating and sharing ideas amongst medical students. All over the world, medical students are working on global health

issues through IFMSA. Hundreds of activities are planned, designed, and carried out each year on local, national and international level.

Projects, trainings and programs, as well as workshops and seminars, are organized everywhere in the fields of public health, medical education, reproductive health and propagation of a culture of peace, meaning to educate medical students about the most important health care issues nowadays. The results are very concrete and tangible, and both participants and organizers learn that they are not merely powerless subjects in a rapidly internationalizing world, but that they are valuable individuals with a contribution to make to the well-being of the people worldwide.

The experiences obtained in IFMSA show that ideals of a better world are not just illusions, they can be achieved by dedication and perseverance. In IFMSA the emphasis is that the students return in their local environment with the ideas and skills to implement them.

True to its foundation, student **exchanges** remain the backbone of the federation. Every year IFMSA enables approximately 8 000 students to experience the practice of medicine in a different culture abroad, within the different IFMSA schemes of exchange. The exchange activities during the last 52 years have created a continuity and atmosphere of stability, in which the organization has been allowed to grow and in which activities have developed also in other fields.

By involvement in **Public Health** activities, students seek to contribute to the health of the people of the world, both through health education and by directly supportive projects in areas of need.

Through **Medical Education** activities, IFMSA acts as a forum for medical students to discuss their own education, primarily during the two annual meetings and in separate seminars and conferences. Also aims to further medical education by means of creating a database of medical curricula in the world, also collecting medical books for libraries in the developing countries.

Projects in the field of **Refugees and Peace** aim to relieve and prevent the medical repercussions of war by advocating disarmament, promoting tolerance, and enhancing the building of peace after a conflict.

Another major focus in IFMSA is **Reproductive Health**, with the goal of increasing the awareness of the problems related to AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, both among medical students and the population at large, through workshops, summer-schools, and public educational programs

All activities of the federation have the ultimate goal of promoting increased global health and well being, contributing actively to improve the intercultural understanding and preventing violent conflicts through the promotion of human rights.

Meetings

General Assemblies

Twice a year, the delegations of the National Member Organizations of IFMSA get together at the IFMSA General Assemblies. The March Meeting and the August Meeting bring together several hundred (600-700) medical students from all around the world. During the seven days of the meetings, the delegates discuss matters of the Federation and make valuable contacts for their organizations.

The General Assembly remains the highest decision making body of the Federation. An extensive Training and Resources Development component has been integrated in the program, providing the participants with new skills needed in their work, but seldom found in the regular University curriculum.

Round Table Discussions enable the student delegates to discuss currently relevant topics with invited experts and short lectures are frequently given by representatives from, for example, different UN agencies.

A special Financial Committee is elected at each General Assembly to review the budget and finances of the Federation. Other legislative proceedings at the meetings include adoption of reports from the Executive Board members, IFMSA officials and IFMSA projects, and adoption of official IFMSA Policy Statements. Guidelines on which areas IFMSA should focus on and other important decisions for the future of the Federation are prepared by the Presidents of the National Member Organizations together with the Executive Board and brought for approval to the Plenary Sessions.

Sub-Regional Meetings

In addition to the General Assemblies, the National Member Organizations are increasingly often getting together at different Sub-Regional Meetings. These meetings follow no particular agenda, and are usually organized from a mutual need from organizations in neighbouring countries. Some meetings are run as workshops dedicated on a specific topic, be it planning a joint project or skills training, whereas other meetings have a more general agenda, with several of the IFMSA Standing Committees represented. The purpose of the Sub-Regional Meetings is on the one hand to meet the special needs of specific regions, and on the other hand to provide a possibility for active students to participate at international meetings, thus motivating them in their local activities.

History

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations was one of the numerous international student organizations set up directly after the end of the Second World War. The first meeting which saw the setting up of the federation was held in Copenhagen, Denmark in May 1951. The first members of this new organization were England, Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Denmark. London saw the first General Assembly of IFMSA in July 1952. The meeting had a total of thirty participants from ten countries.

The growth of IFMSA through the years has been remarkable. Starting from the exclusively European founding organizations the federation has expanded to include 93 members from all over the world in the fifty years of our organization.

IFMSA has always focused on student mobility and exchange as well as conference and workshop organization. The first conferences were the Student International Clinical Conferences which were quite successful in the 1950's. Various summer schools have been organized through the years, starting in 1963 in Denmark, the UK and Scandinavia. Other conferences have discussed medical education, drugs and AIDS and HIV issues. In the 1960's projects were organized to help less advantaged students in developing countries the Book Aid project, which sought to send medical books from wealthier nations and the Equipment Appeal, which promoted the shipping of surplus medical equipment to these countries.

The 1970's medical students saw a need for the decentralization of IFMSA. To this aim, IFMSA contributed to the creation of regional medical student organizations in Africa and Asia. Subsequently, regional vice-presidents were elected for six regions as a way of promoting regionalization but this structure was abandoned after a few years.

In the early 1980's IFMSA issued a number of resolutions and declarations on topics ranging from Medical Education to the Prevention of Nuclear War to Primary Health Care. In the late 80's there was a push towards organizing projects which would be able to make a change locally and thus the Village Concept Project idea was born after collaboration with other international student organizations. 1986 also saw the start of the Leadership Training Programs in collaboration with WHO. These training programs are still active today.

Official relations with WHO started back in 1969, when the collaboration resulted in the organization of a symposium on "Programmed Learning in Medical Education", as well as immunology and tropical medicine programs. In the following years, IFMSA and WHO collaborated in the organization of a number of workshops and training programs. Currently, we are working closely with the department of Child and Adolescent Health and Development, which also serves as a gateway to other departments. IFMSA has been collaborating with UNESCO since 1971 when a symposium on pollution and overpopulation was organized and with the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War since 1983.

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