

## **ASA (Australasian Sonographers Association) 2017 Brisbane: 24<sup>th</sup> International Conference**



Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC) 2-4 June 2017.

Maximum delegate attendance, an interactive and robust conference program and a destination and venue that ticked all the right boxes, combined to elevate the 2017 Australasian Sonographers Association Conference to new heights.

The largest Sonographer Conference in Australasia, the three-day annual event attracted 1,300 delegates from Australia and New Zealand with a small contingent from overseas, representing a year-on-year increase in delegate numbers for the event, exceeding similar sector conference attendances in Great Britain and the United States.

According to Dr. Gillian Whalley, Acting CEO of the Australasian Sonographers Association, both BCEC, which she says delivered their most successful ever conference, and the popularity of Brisbane as a destination for its wonderful winter climate and ultrasound educational strengths contributed to the success of the event.

### **Overview / Profile of the Event**

Primary objective of the ASA annual event is to provide a bespoke conference which focuses on general education for sonographers. "Although sonographers may go to conferences within their specialities such as obstetrics, cardiology, vascular, this is the only conference where the majority of attendees are sonographers – it is the largest of its kind in Australasia and possible the world," Dr Whalley states.

Feedback from Association members strongly indicates that networking and collaborating with colleagues is high on their list of priorities when they attend a conference, so it is no surprise that facilitation of networking opportunities is a key component of the program.

Celebrating their highest ever number of submitted abstracts at this event, Dr Whalley says they have lessened their focus slightly on invited speakers and instead moved towards original research and ideas being presented by members. "It is important for our members to share

knowledge with each other and find ways as professionals to improve evidence-based practice.”

Making the conference work for one, two or three day registration is central to the agenda, particularly when more than 70% of members are women balancing family and work commitments. The structure of the conference program was designed to address this issue by ensuring similar or linked topics were clustered or scheduled on one day.

## **Congress Highlights**

The overriding highlight of the conference was the fact that organisers exceeded their targets for delegate attendance. This was achieved due to several factors. The venue and location were popular with delegates, the program was of an excellent standard and the organising committee chose to maintain existing registration prices to keep the conference accessible.

Dr. Whalley said Brisbane’s connectivity and air access was an influencing factor. “Brisbane has a lot of regular flights, including from New Zealand, important in light of our sizeable New Zealand membership.”

Hands-on scanning workshops were well received by delegates and provide a definite highlight of the conference program. These events require multiple rooms seating 60 – 100 and to be run concurrently. According to Dr Whalley there are very few, if any, conferences that offer this degree of live scanning education.

The Social Program is always a keen favourite with delegates and extremely well attended, with the gala dinner and conference awards breakfast lauded by members, both in terms of atmosphere and catering.

## **Challenges**

Dr Whalley says any challenges at conferences are usually related to Audio Visual. “Our presenters often have complex video needs particularly in the live scanning sessions when we need to switch between power point and a feed from the ultrasound machine. The Centre’s AV team delivered a first class service with no issues.”

One of the conference’s main on-going challenges has been that the ASA has traditionally managed their conferences in-house. Although they say this was successful from a delegate point of view, it took a toll on staff and hindered expansionary plans. The Association contracted The Conference Company for the 2017 event based on past experience and their ability to take over half way through planning.

According to Dr Whalley, this strategy was a significant turning point for the organisation. They were able to bring on large numbers of experienced staff during the busiest of times as well as leveraging the company’s existing relationship with the venue.

A positive challenge to come out of the conference was the new agenda item of live ultrasound scanning on the exhibition floor. It was a hit with delegates who enjoyed the interaction with exhibitors. “To do this we needed to develop a strict policy around how this would be done safely and professionally. But it’s great when an innovation creates the need for thinking about

complex situations and pushes boundaries. Innovations like this offer new experiences for our delegates and keep our conference fresh,” Dr Whalley said.

## The Venue

Having hailed the 2017 conference as ‘their best ever,’ Dr. Whalley said what they experienced with BCEC was a true partnership in the lead-up to the conference and throughout the event.

“They were very open to our requests and suggestions and I felt we were really listened to. They came to us with solutions and identified potential problems beforehand.”

Catering and the flexibility of the spaces were venue highlights. “All of the feedback from delegates was that the catering was excellent with special mention of the variety and quality of the gluten free meals.” Conference organisers took advantage of the Centre’s new ‘Fill up on Life’ menus which showcase Queensland fresh produce and which incorporate gluten free meals in 75% of entrees and mains.

In summing up: “We have decided to hold three out of the next six conferences at BCEC and are looking forward to working with this professional team who we believe will help us to create world class events, and together with The Conference Company will help us grow our reach into South East Asia.”

[High res images available here.](#)

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