

International Forum for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD 2015)

Putting a much needed spotlight on living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which has killed more Australian soldiers than the enemy

OVERVIEW

The International Forum for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD 2015) was held at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC), 10 to 12 September, 2015.

It was attended by over 400 delegates including psychiatrists, psychologists and other medical specialists and support organisations from all around Australia and from the USA and Canada.

This inaugural event was designed to heighten awareness of the most misunderstood of all major illnesses and to draw together the many disparate groups working in PTSD treatment and research.

PTSD 2015 was hosted by Stand Tall, an organisation devoted to PTSD founded by former Australian test cricketer Tony Dell, himself a Vietnam veteran and sufferer of PTSD. Brisbane-based PCO Carillon Conference Management Pty Limited (CCM) took on management of the project and was fundamental in turning the forum concept into the exceptionally successful event.

PRIME OBJECTIVE

Tony Dell explains that “PTSD has flown under the radar for 100 years and is the least understood of all major illnesses. Many, many people have been working in isolation and not communicating and others were achieving success with non-traditional forms of treatment but word was not being spread. On top of this, treatment options are very much capital-city centric and an audit was needed.

Collaboration and inclusiveness were essential and this led to the concept of the Forum as a way to bring everyone together.” A further objective was to raise the awareness of PTSD not only in the Military, but in First Responders; being Police, Ambulance, Fire and Emergency Services.

HIGHLIGHTS

The response from target organisations was exceptional and one of the real highlights of the Forum, according to Tony Dell, was the attendance of top level defence and first-responder commanders. The Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Air Chief Marshall Mark Binskin AC and former Chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AC, AFC attended the Forum as did many very senior officers from the three defence services and state police and emergency services.

Further highlights were the quality of speakers and presentations in an innovative program that covered all aspects of PTSD.

There was great support for the event as well, very notably by the Patron Sponsor, RSL Queensland, who really worked in partnership to deliver a first class event. Most important was the genuine willingness to share knowledge and collaborate into the future.

OUTSTANDING FEATURES

“The Forum exceeded all expectations of it” remarked Tony Dell, “it attracted more delegates, greater sponsorship, a higher media profile and more institutional support than we ever dared hope for.”

CHALLENGES

The overwhelming support for the event and the willingness of all parties to share experiences and make a contribution largely overcame the challenges. CCM’s Ashley Gordon remarked that particular care had to be taken with registration fees, so as to not prohibit participation by PTSD sufferers some of whom live on limited incomes. “We created special fees for Veterans and used sponsorship to finance the significant discount for these delegates.”

LEGACIES

Tony said “as a result of the Forum the next two years will be incredibly active in the PTSD space for the Stand Tall organisation, our Patron RSL Queensland and our other partners. Transitional pilot programs for dealing with PTSD arising from the forum have been well received by the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defence.

The Forum has not only created a greater awareness and understanding of PTSD but is leading to real policy change – a remarkable outcome.”

BRISBANE

CCM Proprietor and Director of Client Relationships, Ashley Gordon, commented that Brisbane was a logical choice for the Forum, given the very large Defence establishments and community in and around the city and its easy accessibility for national and international delegates. “Our American and Canadian delegates now have a choice of regular direct flights into Brisbane which makes their travel much simpler and more convenient.” BCEC proved to be an ideal venue for the Forum.

Ashley described how “the very design of the Boulevard level at BCEC on Grey Street enabled us to accommodate keynote and concurrent sessions, catering, social events, live broadcast facilities and the exhibition all on the same floor, immediately adjacent to one another. The proximity of the various elements to each other really gave the event an energy and ‘vibe’ that would not have been possible in any other combination of spaces.

Just as important is the fact that the Forum basically filled the entire floor even though it was a medium sized event – this meant no through traffic and a real sense of ownership of the space. It worked so well we have booked exactly the same footprint for the 2017 event.”

EXTRA POINTS

There were many program highlights and the Gala Dinner was exceptional, but one session that really struck a chord with the audience was presented by Senior Sergeant Daryl Green of the Queensland Police Service. In 2000 the then Constable Green and two colleagues were sitting in a police car when they were ambushed and shot at close range in Brisbane.

Daryl was shot in the face and shoulder. Amazingly all three officers survived but it was the beginning of a long and painful journey. Daryl endured 7 years of facial reconstruction surgeries and experienced depression and the effects of PTSD for the first time. Daryl received

CASE STUDY



a standing ovation from the audience after his keynote presentation about the effects of PTSD at the Forum.

CCM's Ashley Gordon was back stage as Daryl came off "I looked into the audience and saw them standing and applauding as Daryl walked towards me. Amongst those standing were senior commanders from all three services and several police forces. I told Daryl to go back on stage and see for himself, which he did. His parents were in the audience and it was a really touching moment."

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