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Short Article

The InterAcademy Partnership's Young Physician Leaders: A Leadership Training and Networking Program

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Abstract—The research, clinical, public health, and health policy areas of the health sector all need effective leaders. However, many young professionals learn their leadership skills by trial and error as they advance through their careers. Though some countries are making efforts to incorporate leadership training programs into their medical curricula, the provision of such training is available in too few countries.

To fill this gap and contribute to building capacity for future leadership among health professionals worldwide, the InterAcademy Partnership for Health launched its Young Physician Leaders (YPL) program in 2011. The program provides a tailored workshop on leadership; the opportunity, via the World Health Summit, to engage with global leaders in the field of medicine and health; a matchmaking mentorship scheme; a network of peers with whom to share experiences and exchange best practices; and an interactive website to post real-time professional information and gain visibility both nationally and internationally.

To date, some 107 YPL, nominated by some 30 academies of science and medicine and six other institutions, have participated in the scheme.

In addition, some 30 YPL alumni from about 20 countries were selected to attend the recent World Health Assembly (WHA69). As well as gaining first-hand experience of the decision-making processes of the WHA, the event helped build their individual capacities because they had the opportunity to link with their national decision makers in global health policy.

Though there is room for expansion of the program, it has been well received as an approach to supporting the leadership development of a new generation of physicians who will eventually lead clinical, educational, and research institutions and contribute to their societies and globally to improve health for all.

Keywords: academies, capacity building, health system, leadership, young physician leaders

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INTRODUCTION

The research, clinical practice, education, public health, and health policy areas of the health sector all need effective leaders. Though the need is recognized, many young professionals, especially physicians, have to learn their leadership skills by trial and error as they advance through their careers and are asked to step into positions of increasing responsibility. Though there are efforts to incorporate leadership training programs into the medical curriculum, in practice, too few countries are actually providing such training, as highlighted in the Lancet Commission report, “Health Professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world.”¹ Thousands of books and hundreds of programs aim to prepare individuals for leadership roles, but actual investment in such programs, especially for physicians in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), is very low.²

To contribute to building capacity for future leadership of this important cadre of health professionals, the InterAcademy Partnership for Health (IAP for Health, formerly the InterAcademy Medical Panel, IAMP) launched its Young Physician Leaders (YPL) program in 2011.³

The major goals of the program are to develop a critical mass of young physician leaders who form a global learning and action network; to provide an introduction to the knowledge and skills that young physicians need to face the challenges of assuming leadership roles within medicine, the health care and public health systems, and the larger society; and to engage IAP for Health member academies to support the next generation of physician leaders in their countries.

The inaugural event was held at the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, in October 2011, in conjunction with the 2011 World Health Summit (WHS),⁴ Berlin, Germany. Subsequent editions have since been held each year in Berlin, always in partnership with the WHS and the M8 Alliance of Academic Health Centers and Medical Universities (M8 Alliance).⁵ In addition, a regional event was organized at the Regional WHS in Singapore in 2013.

To date, IAP for Health has trained 107 such YPL. In addition, in May 2016, 26 of the program’s alumni convened in Geneva, Switzerland, at the first ever YPL reunion event. This activity gave the alumni an opportunity to reflect on and share their experience in applying their training; engage in focused modules on leadership issues identified by them prior to the event; and provide them with experience as active participants in the World Health Organization’s World Health Assembly.

This article will provide a descriptive study of this innovative program: its goals, recruitment, and selection methods; the leadership training provided; kinds of challenges participants face in their career advancement; and recommendations for next steps.

THE PROGRAM

IAP for Health, part of the IAP,⁶ is a global network of 78 academies of medicine and academies of science with significant medical membership. As such, it provides the global reach and credibility to provide a platform for such a program.

Participants in the YPL program are nominated by academies of science or medicine that are members of the IAP for Health network or university members of the M8 Alliance, a partner of IAP for Health. The selection process, overseen by world-renowned scholars and leaders affiliated with IAP for Health, is highly competitive and guarantees the excellence of the participants.

Participant Selection

Nominated candidates are selected on the following criteria:

- Young physicians aged 40 or below with demonstrated outstanding accomplishments in clinical medicine, medical education, public health or health policy, and applied research.
- Candidates who show significant promise for leadership in their fields in the future.
- Enthusiastic candidates with excellent communication and interpersonal skills and fluent in English.
- Candidates with the ability, desire, and personality to represent the medical profession well when interacting outside regular professional meetings.
- Candidates with demonstrated interest in and engagement with issues in wider society (for example, educating the public on health issues; health advocacy; leadership within their specialty/professional group or institution; engagement with other sectors such as business, nongovernmental organizations, the public, or government on important health and health policy issues).

Because of the selection criteria, the program has brought together a diverse group of young physicians from multiple specialties and career interests. Though virtually all have advanced degrees and research training in addition to their medical training and a faculty appointment in a school of medicine or public health, this program was designed to offer an experience to individuals whose career interest is not primarily research, which is often the sole focus of most such global fellowship opportunities. Up to a maximum of 25 YPL can be selected each year. When selecting the cohort of participants, attention is always paid to the diversity of geographic origin of the participants, as well as the economic status of their home nations and the gender balance within the group.

Leadership Training

Because of the cost of a global program and the reality of the amount of time that busy young professionals can take away from the job responsibilities, the time for the program is highly compressed. Though the length and design of leadership training programs are highly variable, this program was designed to introduce young physicians to the theory and practice of leadership; make them aware of the kinds of assistance they can seek to support them in taking on these challenges; provide them with tools to identify their own strengths and weaknesses as leaders and act on identified gaps; and provide peer support and mentoring for their activities after the program.

Key elements of the annual leadership development program include the following:

- Completion of a pre-workshop questionnaire that asks participants to reflect on the challenges and successes of their own leadership experiences; to describe the traits of those they see as effective leaders; and to identify the areas in which they need to improve their leadership practice as well as their personal goals for the workshop. This assessment is returned to the IAP for Health secretariat prior to the session and used as a basis for initial discussions with participants and design of the workshop.
- Pre-event readings on leadership theory^{7,8} are provided and discussed in a session on the evolution of leadership theory.
- The formal program began as a one-day session, and soon expanded to one and a half days based on feedback from participants within the time constraint. It is a highly participatory program that includes group discussions of effective models of leadership; explorations of cultural differences in leadership styles within different regional groupings; and challenges and opportunities faced by young physicians in assuming leadership positions in their countries. The experience also includes a leadership panel featuring international physician leaders who share their career paths and, following the workshop, serve as mentors and role models. Participants use these discussions as a basis for developing an individual action plan for their own leadership development following the workshop and they pair with another YPL to provide peer follow-up on their success at implementing the plan. Each cohort is supported by the IAP for Health secretariat in facilitating ongoing peer learning networks and, to aid in sharing their career experiences and challenges in their countries, facilitating follow-up interaction of the YPL alumni with their sponsoring academy.
- Following the workshop, each YPL cohort has the opportunity to be special guests at the WHS and is expected to present a session in the formal program, which is designed by them as part of the leadership workshop. The WHS is attended by international medical and scientific professionals, government officials, business leaders, and health-related organizations (e.g., World Health Organization [WHO], The Global Fund) and provides participants with an outstanding scientific and policy program as well as opportunities to learn and practice networking with some 1,500 other participants of the main WHS program, and designing and participating in a session for a global audience.
- Participants are also offered a personalized tour of the key scientific institutions in Berlin, Germany, and interviews with their leaders, as well as networking opportunities with members of the IAP for Health Executive Committee members and WHS participants, including local and national government officials and diplomatic representatives.
- Mentorship opportunities with IAP for Health Executive Committee members and with other experts/leaders within the nominating academies at country level are designed to aid implementation of their individual leadership action plans defined during the training sessions.
- As an important step in advancing the development of an active alumni network among the YPL from different cohorts, in January 2015, IAP for Health launched a searchable online YPL alumni directory that now includes the details of all 107 alumni.⁹ As well as encouraging networking among the YPL, the directory aims to give them added visibility, raising their profiles both nationally and globally.

Program Faculty

Since inception of the program, the director has been one of the authors of this article, Dr. Jo Ivey Boufford, with critical assistance from Muthoni Kareithi as both faculty and program administrator. Other key faculty for individual sessions and career panels have been Dr. Peter McGrath and members of the IAP for Health Executive Committee and physician leaders attending the M8 Summit. Dr. Thomas Zeltner, honorary member of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences and Special Envoy of the WHO, served as codirector of the alumni meeting in Geneva at WHA69. As the program has continued, selected alumni have been invited back to serve as faculty for a new intake of YPL. In addition to the global meetings, one regional YPL meeting was coordinated by an

alumnus and led by the IAP for Health co-chair, Professor Lai Meng Looi, and local faculty. It was held in conjunction with the Asia regional WHS in Singapore in 2013. This event featured 10 YPL from such countries as Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, which do not have academies and would thus be unlikely to be included in the international event.

RESULTS

To date, 107 young physicians from some 30 countries have participated in the IAP for Health YPL leadership training program. A summary of these alumni is included in Table 1. As shown, about three quarters (73%) of the alumni come from more than 20 LMICs, and 45 (42%) are women. In addition, some 30 academies of science and medicine as well as a number of universities and other institutions affiliated with the M8 Alliance have been active in nominating talented physicians (Table 2).

Though no formal evaluation has been conducted to measure impact of the experience on the career advancement or leadership behaviors of the YPLs (see discussion below), at the conclusion of each YPL cohort experience, participants were involved in a detailed debriefing of the program to identify its strengths and weaknesses and share lessons learned from the entire experience.

In addition, following two of the Berlin workshops, the YPL in the cohort worked together to draft reports for publication. The first of these was a letter on leadership challenges published in *The Lancet*.¹⁰ In this article, written by a subgroup of the first ever YPL cohort, the authors identified common challenges to young leaders that have since been confirmed by subsequent YPL cohorts. These include “the difficulty of breaking down silos, and that politics, as well as preference for seniority over talent, can often get in the way of success.” They also noted that, independent of the country,

developing credibility and breaking into established hierarchies were difficult.

“Most important from this experience was the sense that the world is small; that the goals, aspirations, and challenges of our junior faculty remain similar despite vastly different cultures and access to resources,” conclude the authors.

Two years later, again in *The Lancet*, the 2013 YPL cohort asked “What Has the Young Physician Leaders Programme Achieved?”¹¹ based on the results compiled from a questionnaire sent out to alumni of the first three YPL workshops. As well as confirming some of the same challenges faced by young leaders and identifying others, the survey highlighted that, again irrespective of country of origin, there was a lack of formal opportunities for leadership training and mentorship. However, they also identified actions that YPL could take to overcome certain challenges, including developing supportive relationships with senior colleagues who are willing to help bridge the senior–junior age gap and help the younger professionals build credibility and connections. The authors also emphasized the value of using the principles of “emotional intelligence”² to which they had been introduced during the workshop to manage their frustrations and to act less impulsively, taking the time to assess a situation and better understand any organizational dynamics at work.

Alumni Network

Due to the compressed nature of the leadership development experience, and seeing the value of peer learning among a global group of peers, an interactive website, described above, was seen as critical to support this unique alumni group, but the importance of periodic face-to-face meetings cannot be understated. To this end, IAP for Health determined to sponsor a YPL fifth-year reunion on the occasion of the 2016 World Health Assembly (WHA69), in partnership with the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies¹² in Geneva. Some 30 YPL alumni from about 20 countries were either accredited with various nongovernmental organizations or, often through the intervention of their nominating academies, integrated into their country delegations.

The alumni were drawn from all five cohorts. Prior to the beginning of the WHA, a one-and-a-half-day workshop was held to review and share their progress on their leadership plans with their own group and then meet in regional groups to discuss challenges and opportunities and develop new support networks across cohorts. The group was also organized as a delegation and during the event, teams were created to follow priority issues of IAP for Health, including building research capacity in LMICs, urban health, and antibiotic

Year, Venue	Total Attending	From HICs	From LMICs	Women	Alumni
2011, Berlin	22	5	17	9	—
2012, Berlin	17	6	11	9	5
2013, Singapore	10	0	10	5	2
2013, Berlin	19	6	13	9	—
2014, Berlin	20	5	15	7	4
2015, Berlin	19	7	12	6	—
Total	107	29	78	45	11

TABLE 1. Summary of Young Physician Leaders (YPL) Participating in the Global and Regional Leadership Training Workshops Between 2011 and 2015. *Note.* HICs = high-income countries, LMICs = low- and middle-income countries

Country	Nominating Academy	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Australia	M8: Monash University		1	2	2	1	6
Bangladesh	Bangladesh Academy of Sciences	1	2	1	1	1	6
Brazil	Brazilian Academy of Sciences	2	2	2	1	2	9
	Academia Brasileira di Medicina				1		1
Cameroon	Cameroon Academy of Sciences			1			1
Canada	Canadian Academy of Health Sciences			2			2
Colombia	Academia Nacional de Medicina de Colombia	1					1
Egypt	Academy of Scientific Research and Technology		1				1
France	Académie Nationale de Medecine					1	1
	Académie des Sciences France	1					1
Germany	German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina			1		1	2
	Union of German Science Academies	1					1
	M8: Charité Hospital Berlin		1			1	2
Hungary	Hungarian Academy of Sciences			1	2	1	4
Kenya	Kenya National Academy of Sciences				1		1
Laos	M8: National University of Singapore			1			1
Latvia	Latvian Academy of Science					1	1
Lebanon	The World Academy of Sciences				1		1
Macedonia	Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts	1				1	2
Malaysia	Academy of Science Malaysia	2	1	3		1	7
Mongolia	Mongolia Academy of Medical Sciences	1		1	1		3
Nigeria	Nigerian Academy of Science	2	2	2	2	1	9
Peru	National Academy of Sciences, Peru	1					1
Philippines	National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines	1	2	3	1	2	9
Romania	Romanian Academy of Medical Sciences					1	1
Russia	Russian Academy of Sciences	1					1
South Africa	Academy of Sciences of South Africa	1	2	2	2	1	8
Singapore	M8: National University of Singapore		2	1	1		4
Sri Lanka	National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka	1	1	2	1	1	6
Sweden	Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences		1		1		2
Switzerland	Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences				1		1
Tanzania	Tanzania Academy of Sciences	1		1	1		3
Thailand	Thai Academy of Science and Technology		1		1	1	3
Uganda	Uganda National Academy of Sciences	1					1
UK	M8: London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine					1	1
United States	National Academy of Medicine (formerly Institute of Medicine)	1	1				2
Vietnam	M8: National University of Singapore			1			1
	Totals	20	20	27	21	19	107

TABLE 2. Summary of Home Nations and Nominating Academies of Young Physician Leaders (YPL) Participating in the Global and Regional Leadership Training Workshops Between 2011 and 2015

resistance. Through daily delegation meetings, they reported to each other on sessions attended. YPL who were members of their country delegations also reported on those deliberations as permitted. In addition, prior to the opening of the WHA, they joined a standing program of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies for new delegates to the WHA for a half-day program to be fully briefed on how the assembly works and to meet key WHO officials. Finally, a working group was established to develop an explicit proposal to further activate the alumni network and

secure funding to develop it into a useful and dynamic resource for all participants.

Among the other spin-offs of the program, in Sri Lanka, four alumni have created a steering committee that has led to the launch of the National Young Health Professionals Program. At its first workshop in June 2015, 15 young health professionals under the age of 40, both medical and nonmedical with research and teaching skills and who have taken on positions of increased responsibility in their careers, were brought together to network both socially and academically.

Alumni from the Philippines also worked with the IAP for Health Executive Committee member from their country to sponsor a national young physician leadership development program in late in 2015.

DISCUSSION

The first five years of the IAP for Health YPL program have demonstrated the strong demand for such a program, as evidenced by the responses of participants and the continued nominations of potential participants by member academies. Indeed, the opportunity for sharing experiences during the formative stages of a young professional's career through such an international initiative is unprecedented.

Because of time and financial constraints, the program serves more as an introduction to leadership theory and practice. However, it also links the participants to available experts and others who can provide advice, coaching, and further skill building as they advance in their careers. By emphasizing experiential learning over lectures as the core experience of the program's approach, a time and space is created in which participants feel comfortable reflecting on their own leadership styles in real time; they can practice the tools that they can continue to use; and receive feedback from and learn from others about alternative strategies for success. Because of the commitment to the program, faculty time has been free and space for the workshop sessions has been provided in kind. The program has received critical financial support from the Tides Foundation since 2013 and in-kind support from the M8 Alliance of Academic Health Centers and Medical Universities, the World Health Summit, and the Bayer Science and Education Foundation. Academies of science and health have also provided travel support for participants they nominated, especially those in high-income countries.

However, as pointed out by Giles et al.,¹¹ with just 107 participants in five years, it is clear that the scale of the program, as it stands at present, is barely scratching the surface of the training needs for young health care professionals around the globe. In addition, although IAP has managed to attract these important sponsors for the program, there is a need for long-term sustained funding that will allow IAP to continue to organize the annual workshop in Berlin or flexibly in conjunction with other major global meetings; support regional leadership development programs, as well as regular alumni reunion events every three to five years (such as at the WHA); and support an active global alumni network through a sophisticated, highly interactive website with a dedicated staff member. Additional funding could also support a more targeted evaluation of the impact of the program on its participants.

Next Steps

IAP for Health continues to consider its YPL initiative as a flagship program and one that has clearly identified a need previously not addressed, especially at a global level, with a strong engagement of young physician leaders from LMICs. IAP for Health is committed to continue building on the program through its member academies of science and medicine and their individual members who can provide examples of successful leadership in all areas of the health sector.

A recent step in building sustainability of the program has been to create a partnership with the Berlin-based European School of Management and Technology,¹³ which will become codirectors of the YPL program beginning with the 2016 cohort.

By expanding the number of partners involved in the project and developing concrete plans to ensure the sustainability and growth of the YPL alumni network, IAP for Health hopes that the impact and influence of the program will grow, especially as its various cohorts of YPL advance in their careers and take up posts with increasing responsibility.

DISCLOSURE OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors confirm they have no conflicts of interest.

FUNDING

The IAP for Health Young Physician Leaders program has received financial support from the Tides Foundation since 2013, as well as in-kind support from the M8 Alliance of Academic Health Centres and Medical Universities, the World Health Summit, and the Bayer Science and Education Foundation. Many academies of science and health have also provided travel support for participants they nominated. In addition, the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences provided financial and logistical support for the recent YPL reunion at the May 2016 World Health Assembly.

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