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2014

10.1007/s00247-014-2939-7

Peer reviewed
Another international imaging society—to what end?

The World Federation of Pediatric Imaging: one voice, a common message, a unified network

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The foundations of the World Federation of Pediatric Imaging were laid during the first International Symposium on Pediatric Imaging held in Rio de Janeiro in 2009. Pediatric radiologists from all over the world came together to share their knowledge with colleagues. A global movement was born to better integrate the existing international societies of pediatric imaging with regional and local organizations and to unite voices advocating for universal access to appropriate pediatric imaging (Fig. 1). Created in 2011, the World Federation of Pediatric Imaging (WFPI) works to unite pediatric imaging organizations to form one voice, a common message, and a unified network in addressing the global challenges of pediatric imaging.

The tremendous disparities in pediatric imaging practices and resources served as an incentive to pool the substantial resources of existing societies. These societies had a common purpose but lacked coordination of efforts to advocate side-by-side for the inclusion of pediatric imaging as a subspeciality in the care of children worldwide. Diagnostic imaging services in modern medical settings have evolved enormously, but even state-of-the-art health care can overlook the unique needs of children. Dedicated pediatric imaging training is quite simply out of reach for most of the lower-resource nations already confronting multiple health challenges. Although such nations’ pediatric populations are huge, appropriate diagnostic imaging services are rarely integrated into national health plans; yet these services save lives.

Deployment of a united platform is encapsulated through our membership reach. Longstanding regional societies (founding members the Asian and Oceanic Society for Paediatric Radiology [AOSPR], European Society of Paediatric Radiology [ESPR], Latin American Society of Pediatric Radiology [SLARP] and The Society for Pediatric Radiology [SPR]) were rapidly joined by the newly created African Society of Paediatric Imaging at a governance level. At a national level, our numbers include a range of societies well-established in Europe, the Indian Society of Paediatric Radiology and two other groups from Africa, the latest in Nigeria (SPIN), established on the impetus of the WFPI. We will continue to expand our participant base through reaching out to pediatric imaging societies and pediatric interest groups across the world. The goal is to broaden representation and pool available resources, not to replace the activities of the existing societies (Fig. 2).

Sealing federation between individual physician members of these societies is commensurate with the rising trajectory of the WFPI. Recent ventures include cross-regional WFPI representation in World Health Organization meetings on patient safety and international collaboration in education and outreach projects, as described in subsequent articles in this issue of the journal. Our Web site and newsletters are windows to these efforts, reflecting burgeoning global stewardship as traction is gained.

To address the global challenges in pediatric imaging, we will continue to participate in global forums via robust collaboration with the world’s major health organizations. Our Web site was launched in March 2013 (www.wfpiweb.org),
and dissemination of best practices and educational content is being developed through Web site tools. We will work on recommendations, training and research while advocating for resource allocation and patient safety.

Our work in lower-resource settings during this initial phase has brought challenges. We are exploring our operational bandwidth via several initiatives already underway. These include an education course delivered in Haiti and one planned for March 2014 in Ethiopia and South Africa, training for Mozambique physicians in the United States, tele-reading in support of facilities with limited or no access to pediatric radiologists, and preparations for involvement in childhood tuberculosis and simplified US protocols. Working hand-in-hand with medical teams on-site, we “bolt on” to existing health care initiatives through parallel routes and diverse mechanisms, prompting partnerships with Ministries of Health, academic institutions, the WHO, and non-profit organizations such as Imaging the World and Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders).

The mini-symposium presented in this journal offers a sample of the work accomplished since our debut and a roadmap for what lies ahead. We hope to show that together we are taking positive strides to improve and extend the reach of pediatric imaging, aspiring to deliver what we promise through volunteer work and teaching.

Of course, the WFPI’s embrace of a global range of cultures, practices and settings has generated its own challenges and frustrations. They will not disappear, but they will not deter us. Our member organizations are proud of their differences and the WFPI calls for a blurring of national and regional lines and a redistribution of the stakeholder cards. Our resource base needs development. Our board and committee members criss-cross 19 time zones, straddle the international dateline and are never all in one place at the same time. Through conviction and necessity, we embrace the virtual world using Web-based tools and on-line meetings to communicate efficiently when required. Yet this represents a paradigm shift for many. And above all, work in lower-resource settings can be fraught with difficulties and dynamics beyond our control, ranging from identifying the right partners to equipment breakdown. But a bend in the road is not the end of the road—unless we fail to make the turn. This is what the authors in this symposium aim to demonstrate. We are a work in progress, pooling our experiences to learn, adapt and forge ahead. We should not be afraid to document this.

The WFPI has progressed faster than the radiologists in Rio de Janeiro ever imagined. Its foundations are laid; the dreamers are becoming doers, driven by the conviction that the application of pediatric imaging is an essential component of children’s basic health care. We hope that this mini-symposium serves to spur on activity around the world,
drawing in younger colleagues and stimulating new concepts and novel ways of joining forces across nations to serve children everywhere.

The WFPI would like to acknowledge the generous donations made by the ESPR, the SPR and the SPR’s Research & Education Foundation toward its initial operating costs, external sponsors for outreach work and institutional support by the American College of Radiology.

**Conflicts of interest**  None