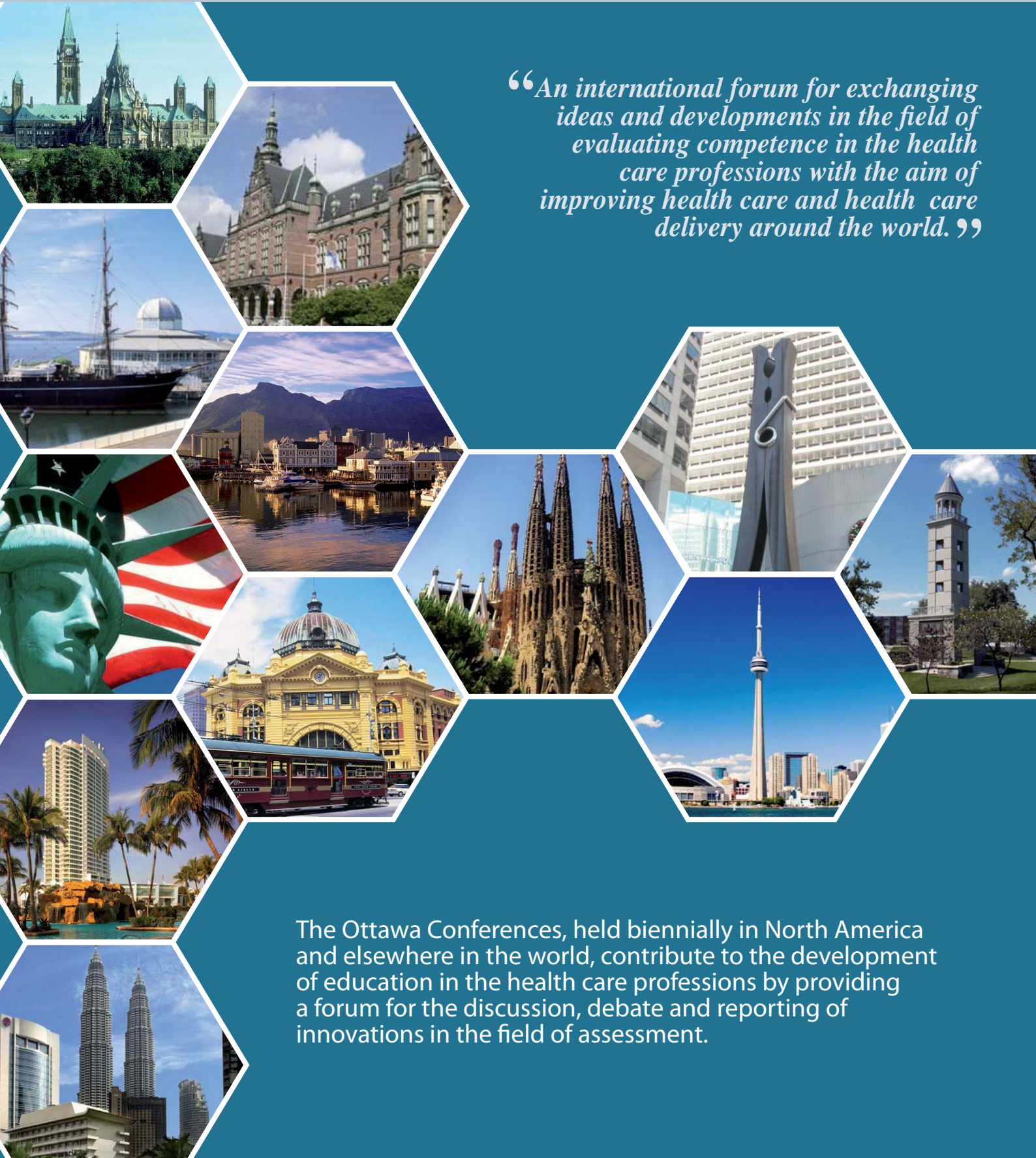


# The Ottawa Conferences

ottawa  
CONFERENCE

[www.ottawaconference.org](http://www.ottawaconference.org)

*“An international forum for exchanging ideas and developments in the field of evaluating competence in the health care professions with the aim of improving health care and health care delivery around the world.”*



The Ottawa Conferences, held biennially in North America and elsewhere in the world, contribute to the development of education in the health care professions by providing a forum for the discussion, debate and reporting of innovations in the field of assessment.

# The Story So Far

**The beginning:** The 1970s and 1980s saw the development and introduction of new approaches to the assessment of students in the health care professions including, in the UK, the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). This allowed a more reliable assessment to be made of communication and other clinical skills, competencies previously not adequately assessed. **Ian Hart**, at that time spending a sabbatical in Dundee, and **Ronald Harden** concluded that there was a need for an international conference on the topic of assessment of clinical competence, to facilitate the sharing of views and experiences from different countries.



A conference was held in Ottawa in June 1985. Initially it was planned that 60 to 100 would participate. In the event, 250 participants came from 19 countries and four continents. Sixty-five papers were presented, authored by 133 contributors. In opening the Conference Jake Epp, Minister of National Health and Welfare of Canada, said "It is my hope that this meeting will encourage the development of international standards of medical education which will lead to further improvements in health care and health care delivery around the world."



**A second conference:** The Conference was voted by those who attended to have been a great success and to have met a real need. The proceedings were published the following year. In response to requests from participants a second "Ottawa" Conference was arranged, sponsored by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and this took place in Ottawa in June 1987. Over 240 people attended and the papers presented and subsequently published covered a wide range of topics including written forms of assessment, performance assessment and the OSCE and in-training and in-practice assessment.

**Biennial conferences:** The University of Groningen offered to host a third Conference to be held two years later in the Netherlands and this set the pattern that has been followed since of a biennial meeting, known as the Ottawa Conference, held alternately in North America and elsewhere in the world.

**Further developments:** Over the years the number of conference participants has risen to over 1000. Hosting a meeting of this size, however, has posed problems for some local hosts who, having been assigned responsibility for the meeting by the Conference Founders, Ian Hart and Ronald Harden, found that its organisation presented logistical difficulties. We have therefore moved to a model where the local host is supported in the organisation of the meeting by the offices of the **Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE)**. This allows for planning and continuity between meetings and for staff with experience in the organisation of large medical education conferences to contribute to the conference planning team. The Ottawa Conference will continue to maintain its own unique identity and role, distinct from that of the AMEE annual conference which is held each year in a European venue. As Founders, we believe that this arrangement will help to ensure the ongoing success of the Ottawa Conference in the years ahead. We believe that the Conference will be able to respond to the significant pressures for change in medical education and to contribute to the developments taking place in assessment philosophy and techniques.

**The future:** The Ottawa Conference has established itself as a key event in the medical education calendar. There is now a community of regular participants from different professional and geographic backgrounds, whose members are willing to share their experiences with newer participants. The conferences are noted for their friendly and welcoming ambience and we hope that they will remain so. In looking to the future we are committed to maintaining the original Conference aims, as set out by Jake Epp in 1985, of encouraging developments in assessment with a view to improving health care and health care delivery around the world.

*Ian Hart*

IAN HART

*Ronald Harden*

RONALD HARDEN

# Topics covered

## “The good, the new, the controversial and the uncomfortable”

The conferences address “*the good, the new, the controversial and the uncomfortable*” aspects of assessment:

- **The good:** Conferences have provided updates and reviews of established techniques and approaches including the latest developments in the use and design of multiple choice question examinations and the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) and the role of assessment in the curriculum including factors contributing to the relationship between assessment and teaching.
- **The new:** The conferences also cover exciting new approaches including, in recent conferences, “*on-the-job*” assessment, the use of portfolios for assessment purposes and technology-enhanced assessment.
- **The controversial:** Controversial issues addressed have been international standards and examinations and the application of psychometrics and qualitative approaches to studies in the area.
- **The uncomfortable:** Examples of more uncomfortable topics discussed have been the assessment of attitudes and professionalism in high stake examinations and the assessment of issues relating to patient safety and errors in practice.

## A wide range of themes

The conferences address a wide range of themes relating to assessment including philosophical issues; the relation between assessment and teaching and learning and curriculum planning; the role of assessment in education in the health care professions; assessment techniques and methods; curriculum and teacher evaluation; and research in the field of assessment including Best Evidence Medical Education. Themes addressed at Ottawa Conferences include:

- assessment of communication skills
- assessment of clinical skills
- assessment of decision making and clinical reasoning
- cultural competence and assessment
- the use of standardised patients
- the use of simulators and hybrid patient/simulator approaches
- progress tests and the assessment of progression
- national licensing examinations
- the concepts of validity and reliability
- context specificity and assessment
- international dimensions
- interprofessional education and assessment
- assessment of teamwork
- ‘on-the-job’ assessment
- assessment of students on entry to medicine
- competency-based assessment
- provision of feedback
- audit and quality assurance
- costs and logistics
- 360 degree assessment
- peer assessment
- the patient as an assessor
- curriculum evaluation
- assessment of the educational environment
- planning for assessment
- research on assessment
- staff/faculty development and assessment
- assessment and the continuum of education

## Phases of education

The conferences address all phases of training in the health care professions including:

- Undergraduate or basic education
- Postgraduate or specialist training
- Continuing education and professional development

## Target audience

The Ottawa Conferences are designed with a wide target audience in mind including deans, curriculum planners, teachers, researchers, education support staff and students and trainees across the different phases of education and from different countries and continents. While the emphasis is on medical education, other health care professions contribute to the meetings and the topics covered reflect the needs of the different health care professions. The meetings also have an interprofessional flavour.

## Conference format

Conference sessions include a range of formats – plenary presentations by invited international authorities, oral presentations and posters by conference participants, preconference and conference workshops and masterclass sessions, theme-based discussion groups and an academic and commercial exhibition.

A consensus statement and series of recommendations for good practice in assessment will be produced following the 2010 meeting in Miami. It is intended that this will be updated at subsequent Ottawa Conferences.

## Ottawa conference venues

### PREVIOUS VENUES

1985	1 <sup>st</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Ottawa, Canada
1987	2 <sup>nd</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Ottawa, Canada
1988	3 <sup>rd</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Groningen, The Netherlands
1990	4 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Ottawa, Canada
1992	5 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Dundee, UK
1994	6 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Toronto, Canada
1996	7 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Maastricht, The Netherlands
1998	8 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Philadelphia, USA
2000	9 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Capetown, South Africa
2002	10 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Ottawa, Canada
2004	11 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Barcelona, Spain
2006	12 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– New York, USA
2008	13 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Melbourne, Australia

### FUTURE VENUES

2010	14 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Miami, USA
2012	15 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2014	16 <sup>th</sup> Ottawa Conference	– Ottawa, Canada

## Ottawa conference founders

Ian Hart (Ottawa) & Ronald Harden (Dundee)

## Ottawa conference secretariat & administration

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