

What worked in a national health professions conference in India? Insights from critical reflection

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Abstract

Background: Health professions education (HPE) conferences aim to foster capacity building, interdisciplinary dialogue, and professional networking. Despite the increase in their frequency in India and globally, evidence of their effectiveness remains limited. In India, the National Conference on Health Professions Education (NCHPE), organized annually by the Academy of Health Professions Educators (AHPE), has become a key platform for faculty development. This paper evaluates the NCHPE-2024, hosted by Era's Lucknow Medical College under the aegis of AHPE.

What was done: An online survey was conducted with 280 participants, with 164 (58.5%) responding. The survey explored motivation, satisfaction, perceived value, and suggestions for improvement. Quantitative data were analyzed using factor analysis and qualitative data through content analysis. **Lessons Learned:** Two key motivational domains emerged after factor analysis, with intrinsic motivation for professional development and peer-influenced motivation, with intrinsic factors

being more prominent. Workshops on patient safety, AI in education, interprofessional learning, and simulation were highly valued. Participants preferred interactive hands-on sessions over traditional lectures, and called for better-structured networking opportunities, such as peer-pairing and small group discussions. A lack of post-conference learning support, including session recordings and follow-up resources, was a notable concern. Scheduling conflicts and underrepresentation of emerging themes like digital pedagogy and faculty well-being, were also highlighted in the survey feedback. Based on the feedback, future conferences may focus on skills-oriented pre-conferences, intentional networking activities, post-conference support, and mechanisms to bridge gaps between learning and practice. Ongoing post-conference evaluations can further improve the quality and relevance of HPE conferences in India.

Keywords: Health Professions Education, Faculty development, Conference, Professional networking, Motivation

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Background

Health professions education (HPE) conferences aim to support capacity building, foster interdisciplinary dialogue, and promote networking and cross-learning among participants.^{1,2} Organizing such conferences requires significant investments of time, financial resources, and human effort. In recent years, the number of HPE conferences has been increasing both, in India and globally. While international studies suggest that conferences can have a modest impact on practice, the evidence remains inconclusive largely due to variations in their objectives, formats, target audiences,

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contextual factors and lack of standardized evaluation tools^{3,4}

The National Conference on Health Professions Education (NCHPE) was initiated in 2007, in collaboration with the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research (FAIMER), to strengthen health professions education in India. Earlier, there was no common national platform for educators from medicine, nursing, dentistry, physiotherapy, and other health professions, resulting in limited cross-disciplinary interaction. Following the establishment of the

Academy of Health Professions Educators (AHPE) in 2013, NCHPE has been conducted annually under its aegis. The conference provides a forum to discuss emerging curricular issues, promote networking, and foster interprofessional collaboration in education and research. However, there is a lack of structured reflection on the factors contributing to the success of these conferences from the participants' perspective. This paper represents an attempt to identify such factors by evaluating participants' responses. This paper also aims to offer practical advice for future conference organizers to enhance the relevance, participant engagement, and outcomes of HPE conferences.

What was done?

In 2024, the 19th National Conference on Health Professions Education (NCHPE) was hosted by Era's Lucknow Medical College, (ELMC) Lucknow. This annual gathering brought together around 280 participants, including faculty members, program directors, educationists, and policymakers from various colleges and universities across the country. Over the three-day event, the conference featured 27 skill-based pre-conference workshops, along with 100 poster presentations and networking sessions.

An approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Era's Lucknow Medical College was obtained to carry out evaluation (R-Cell/ 2024/ 415 dated 1/11/ 2024) by seeking participants' responses to a questionnaire. As the conference was hosted by Era's Lucknow Medical College and Era University and three of the authors are from the same institution, who conceived, planned and conducted the study, ethical approval was obtained from this institution. The survey questionnaire was developed using a combination of closed- and open-ended questions informed by prior research, the NCHPE conference format, and consensus among the evaluation team. It was reviewed for content validity and time required by two members of the medical education unit of ELMC.

Immediately after the event, the questionnaire was administered online to all conference attendees using Google Forms. The survey explored participants' motivations for attending; levels of satisfaction; perceived value; and suggestions for

improvement. It comprised of five sections: (1) Participant information (demographics, HPE experience, AHPE membership, source of information about NCHPE-2025, and nature of participation); (2) Motivation for attending NCHPE; (3) Evaluation of NCHPE (eight closed-ended items on organization, relevance, content quality, delivery, and expectation fulfilment, and two open-ended questions on highlights and valued sessions); (4) Suggestions for future conferences; and (5) Final thoughts on future participation and perceived achievements of NCHPE. Thus, the survey integrated quantitative ratings with qualitative reflections on learning experiences.

A two-pronged analytical approach was employed. First, quantitative data were analyzed. Based on the findings of descriptive analysis which highlighted diverse primary reasons motivating participants to attend the NCHPE, factor analysis was performed to pinpoint the core motivations driving attendance. Participant responses were further analyzed to identify key contributors to satisfaction. Associations between ratings and demographic variables (gender, institutional affiliation, discipline, faculty/student status, and years of HPE experience) were examined using the Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis tests, as appropriate.

Second, open-ended responses were reviewed to explore factors supporting or hindering learning. Two authors independently coded participant statements, drawing on factor analysis results and inductive reading. Consensus was reached through discussion. This mixed-methods approach enabled identification of deeper patterns reflecting the overall effectiveness of the conference, beyond surface-level feedback.

What worked?

Of the 280 attendees, 164 (58.5%; 58 males and 106 females) responded. Of these, 41.5% were from the host institution, and 58.5% external. Amongst the responders, 143 (87.2%) were faculty members and the majority (n=111) had more than 10 years' experience in the field of HPE. The participants included both AHPE members (n=88) and non-members (n= 76). Participants learned about the NCHPE through various channels viz. academic

institutions (n=88), e-mail notifications (n= 34), by word of mouth (n=18), social media platforms (n=16) and 8 participants (4.9%) learned about it through AHPE or NHPE announcements.

Factor analysis identified two core motivational domains for attending NCHPE (Table 1). The first, intrinsic and professional development motivation, showed strong loadings for earning continuing education credits and exploring career opportunities, and included staying updated on HPE trends, learning new teaching methods, and sharing experiences. The second domain reflected social and peer-influenced motivations, including presenting research, networking, and following colleagues’ recommendations. Networking showed

cross-loading on both factors (0.604 and 0.501) . The model demonstrated good validity (KMO = 0.779; significant Bartlett’s test) and acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.705$).

Notably, participants assigned more weight to intrinsic motivations. This finding is significant as it suggests that many educators attend HPE conferences out of a genuine desire to learn and improve, rather than due to institutional mandates or credit requirements.

Some of the illustrative comments presented below support the motivating factors generated through factor analysis and also reflect the participants’ strong appreciation of the conference’s academic

Table 1: Core Motivational Domains

Motivation Items	Rank
Domain 1: Intrinsic & Professional Development	
Earn continuing education credits	1
Network with colleagues and experts in the field	2
Explore career opportunities	3
Share best practices at your institution	4
Gain knowledge about new educational techniques	5
Learn specific topic of your own interest	6
Domain 2: Social & Peer-Influenced	
Network with colleagues and experts in the field	1
Present your research work	2

rigor, relevance to practice, networking opportunities, and supportive learning environment.

“The orations were amazing... this conference gave an opportunity to listen and learn from stalwarts.”

“The conference has opened up many academic avenues and ideas for me... Have met professionals from various subjects.”

“I presented my work in the e-poster presentation. As a dental faculty, we are trying hard for reform of dental education. It is good to be heard and suggestions have been taken.”

“Sessions on patient safety were very enlightening.”

“Pre-conference workshops were practical and worth attending.”

“I valued sessions by the eminent medical educators and the opportunity to meet and reconnect with passionate educators”.

“The warm hospitality provided by the hosts has created an environment conducive to learning, networking, and collaboration.”

Corpas *et al.* (2008), in their 10 simple rules for organizing a scientific meeting, noted that breaks, meals, and poster sessions are ideal opportunities for networking.⁵ Although networking was a key motivation for attendance, largely informal and unstructured formats did not fully meet expectations. Participants suggested curated small-group discussions, peer-pairing based on teaching interests, and sessions such as “Breakfast with experts,” highlighting the need for intentionally designed networking, rather than pure reliance on social breaks.

Traditional lecture-heavy sessions were perceived as less engaging. Evidence indicates that conferences combining interactive and didactic formats result in greater learning than those relying solely on one approach.⁴ Participants of NCHPE-2024 preferred formats that encouraged small-group discussions, problem-solving, and immediate application of concepts.

Workshops were valued most, particularly those on patient safety, artificial intelligence in education, interprofessional education, and simulation-based learning. These sessions were hands-on, interactive, and practice-oriented, aligning well with adult learning principles.

As shown in Figure 1, ratings were overwhelmingly positive across domains including pre-conference communication, registration, content quality and relevance, speakers, networking opportunities, and logistics. Notably, 72.6% of participants rated pre-conference communication as Excellent, while 65.6% rated overall conference content as Excellent, with similarly high ratings for speakers and logistics. These high satisfaction ratings (Fig. 1), with no significant differences ($p>0.05$) between internal and external participants, suggest that the

conference successfully transcended institutional boundaries. Consistently favorable ratings across demographic groups further confirmed uniform perceptions irrespective of participant characteristics.

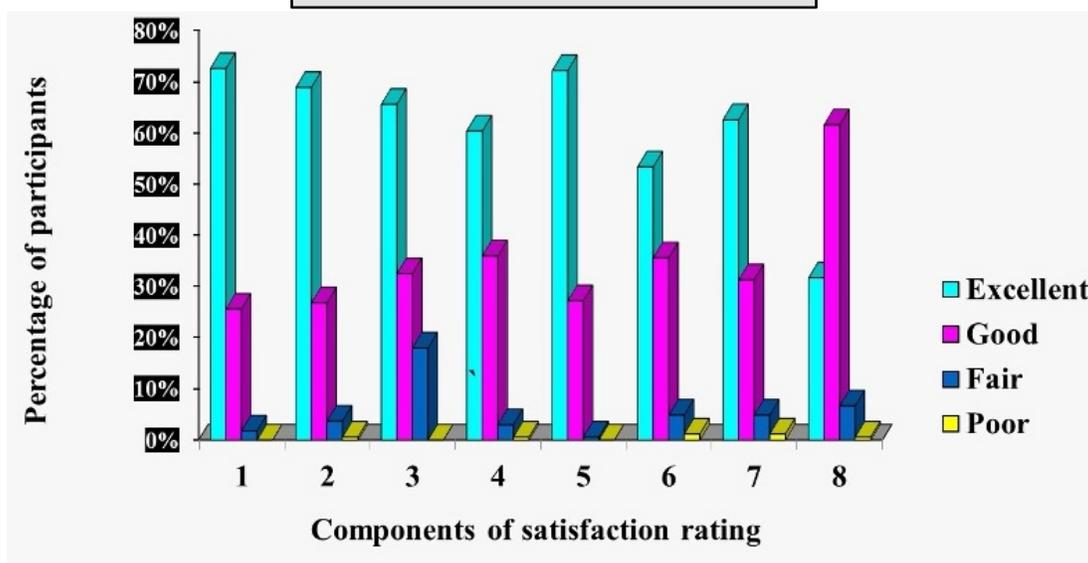
From a scheduling perspective, participants reported that an intensive program with overlapping parallel sessions led to missed learning opportunities. Additionally, the lack of post-conference resources—such as recorded sessions, downloadable materials, or online learning communities—was a source of disappointment. Suggested strategies to extend conference impact included dissemination of proceedings, journal publication, uploading session videos, and sharing evaluation findings online.⁵ Finally, participants laid greater emphasis on digital pedagogy, academic leadership, and faculty well-being, which were perceived as underrepresented.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The evaluation of NCHPE–2024 and reflections on findings underscores several important lessons.

1. A major challenge for NCHPE organizers is participation. Studies on conference motivation identify factors such as meeting colleagues, professional development, knowledge sharing, networking, collaboration, program quality, and event destination.^{1,6,7} We found that participants in Indian HPE conferences are intrinsically motivated and seek authentic learning experiences, valuing opportunities aligned with professional growth, especially hands-on workshops and reflective formats. Networking was also important but needs thoughtful facilitation.
2. Attendees prefer structured formats that go beyond casual informal conversation for networking.
3. Content delivery must prioritize active learning over didactic lectures, and scheduling should be participant-friendly.
4. Sustained learning beyond the conference event was a key expectation. Without post-conference access or follow-up, the long-term impact of the event was perceived to be diminished.

Figure 1: Components of satisfaction rating



Legend: Components of satisfaction rating: 1: Communication prior to conference, 2: Registration process, 3: Overall quality of the conference, 4: Relevance of topics, 5: Quality of content and delivery by speakers, 6: Networking opportunities, 7: Organization and logistics, 8: Extent to which participants' expectations were met

- It is evident that as educators' needs evolve, conferences must diversify thematic scope. Emerging areas such as digital education, academic wellness, and leadership development deserve attention. Digital tools also offer opportunities to extend learning beyond the conference walls.

These findings arise from a one-time cross-sectional evaluation based on participant responses collected immediately after the NCHPE conference, with 42% of respondents from the host institution. Feedback was voluntary and not linked to conference certification; therefore, results rely on self-reported perceptions and may be subject to response bias. Findings may vary with conference format, context, and participant characteristics. Consequently, systematic feedback collection after each conference is necessary to identify consistent elements across conferences.

Health professions education conferences in India offer fertile ground for professional development, but their impact depends on thoughtful design and execution. Hence, based on this insight, we propose

a four-part framework to guide future conference planning:

- Content design** must be grounded in practical, updated, and skill-oriented learning.
- Social architecture** must go beyond content delivery and embrace formats that support reflection, networking, skill-building, and continuity of learning.
- Learning support** should continue after the conference through digital platforms or follow-up modules.
- Post-conference support** must help participants transfer learning into real practice, possibly through mentoring or action plans. By aligning design with participant motivations and needs, HPE conferences can evolve into transformative experiences that meaningfully support educators in their roles.

We feel that this framework can also be extended to subject-specific conferences in the broader health professions field, and can be a part of faculty development workshops while conducting sessions on how to disseminate scientific work.

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