



Contemporary trends can be revealed in an enquiry of presentations at a surgical symposium

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Abstract

Aims Ascertain whether a demographic analysis of the archives of an annual national meeting head and neck section could reflect contemporary issues in our specialty and compare the results with available analysis from other ORL-HNS meetings.

Materials and methods A review of all accepted abstracts of Sylvester O'Halloran Symposium—H&N section, from 2005 to 2020.

Results ORL-HNS was responsible for 77% of the accepted abstracts. Presentations on H&N Malignancy were predominantly from ORL-HNS (84%), while Thyroid presentations were divided with General Surgery (45%). Medical students have appeared in recent years and produced 4% of papers at the last meeting while more junior presenters are participating with an increasing female preponderance (ranging from 7 to 53%). The overall publication rate was 27%, where male authors had a rate of 28% and females 22%. Similar papers published subsequent to the relevant meeting were identified from other institutions in 40% of presentations.

Conclusion This review of presentations at a surgical meeting provides an insight into contemporary issues involving our specialty and lays down markers or challenges for organisers and presenters alike. Presentations on H&N Malignancy have become almost exclusively ORL-HNS, while Thyroid presentations are becoming more valorised to General Surgery and Facial Plastics with our colleagues in Plastic Surgery and Maxillofacial. Our publication rate of 27% is similar to other ORL-HNS meetings. Approximately 10% are published over 5 years after the meeting but presenters should endeavour to publish earlier as others may usurp publication in up to 40% of presentations.

Keywords Head and neck · ORL-HNS · Otolaryngology · Publication rate · Thyroid

Introduction

The Sylvester O'Halloran Peri-operative Symposium was named in honour of a Paris-trained Irish surgeon and author of *Proposals for the Advancement of Surgery in Ireland*.

This document was based on his European experiences and became a prelude to the foundation of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1784.

The first meeting of this multidisciplinary conference was held in 1992 and the Head and Neck section was introduced in 2005. This section has been moderated by the senior author (JEF) from the outset and remains to this day the only annual surgical conference in Ireland that affords a dedicated free paper session for our specialty and allied disciplines. There have been several publications assessing British and American ORL-HNS meetings by focussing on the publication rates of presented papers [1–7]. Few have used their results to enquire as to whether scientific presentations reflect contemporary issues in a surgical discipline [6]. Our aim was to compare the local meeting to the available analyses but also investigate aspects that might illustrate developing trends in our specialty that could be helpful to organisers of any scientific meeting in our specialty or

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stimulate prospective presenters to ultimately publish full-copy of their work in peer-review journals and improve the publication rates of our conferences.

Materials and methods

The accepted abstracts of presentations at the Sylvester O’Halloran Symposium were published in the *Irish Journal of Medical Science* until and including 2017 and in *Mesentery and Peritoneum* since. They are available in journal form on the day of the meeting. All the abstracts of the oral presentations in the Head and Neck section from 2005 to 2019 were analysed to detail the subspecialty of the subject, level and gender of the presenter, specialty and location of source department.

An electronic online search was conducted utilising an iterative approach as described previously, for publication in peer-reviewed journal using PubMed (Medline) and Google Scholar databases [2]. The search was employed for the same author or co-authors, identical or similar title, keywords and topic of the abstract. Paediatric talks were assimilated into regional adult subspecialties to facilitate information reasoning. The data was also questioned to identify similar articles published since the meeting by other departments worldwide. When identified, this information was systematised and included the date and journal of publication. If a match was not found, it was assumed that the article was not published in a journal retrievable by PubMed or Google Scholar.

Results

A total of 171 abstracts were identified during the 15 years of the Head and Neck section of the symposium. The conference had to be cancelled in 2018 and 2020 due to a snow storm and the COVID-19 pandemic respectively.

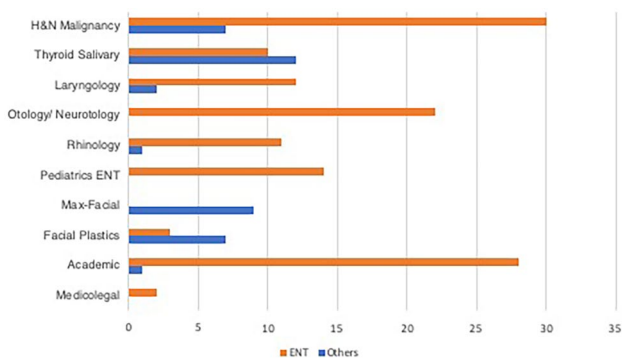


Fig. 1 Subspecialty topics presented divided by specialty source

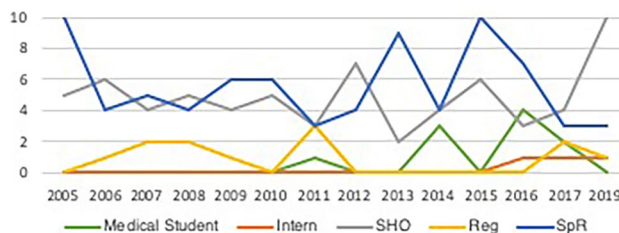


Fig. 2 Progression of level of presenter over the years

The main source of presentations was from Otorhinolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery departments (132) as presented in Fig. 1. Papers were delivered from all ORL-HNS units in Ireland bar one. The majority were from the host department (37%) followed by two Dublin units from St. James Hospital (10%) and the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital (8%) with University Hospital Galway also at 8%. International contributors included Great Britain and USA with 5% and a number representing Australia, France and Greece.

The overall incidence and annual frequency for level and gender of presenter throughout the study period is outlined in Figs. 2 and 3. Two residents failed to attend for their presentations during the study period. The subspecialty topics are incorporated into Fig. 1. The trends for interdisciplinary overlap are delineated in Fig. 4. The overall full-article publication rate in peer-review journals was 27%. Twenty-eight percent of these were published in the same year as the presentation, with 39% during the following year. There was a further 4% at 3 years post presentation followed by 9% at 4 years while 9% took over 5 years for the full article to appear in print. University Hospital of Limerick recorded 46% of all published papers with 13% from St. James Hospital and University Hospital Galway at 9%. The publication rates for the contributing disciplines were ORL-HNS 78%, MFU 11%, General Surgery 9% and Plastic Surgery 2%.

Subspecialty categories of full-article publications consisted of Academic 17%, with Otology/Neurotology and Head and Neck Oncology with 15% each. These were followed by Facial Plastics, Paediatrics ENT and Thyroid Salivary with 11% each. Laryngology and Rhinology comprised

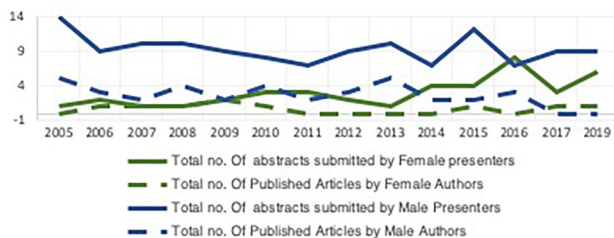


Fig. 3 Progression of total number of abstract and publications divided by gender over the years

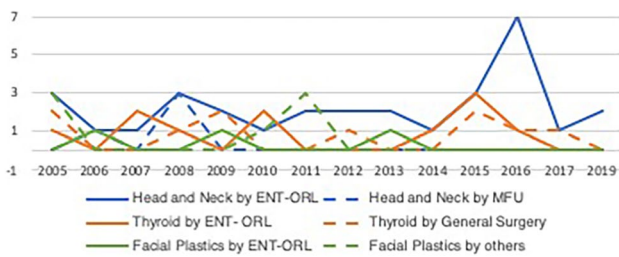


Fig. 4 Trends of the interdisciplinary overlapping topics over the years

7% with 4% Medico-legal and 2% Maxillofacial. Specialist registrars (SpRs) published 52% of papers, senior house officers (SHO) 39%, registrars 4% and medical students 4% with none identified by interns. The publication rate for female authors was 22% and 28% for males (Fig. 3).

The final full-text articles were published in 29 journals, with the most in *Clinical Otolaryngology* (7) followed by four in *The Journal of Laryngology and Otology*. Thirty-six papers were published in specialty journals and none was discovered in online predatory productions. Forty percent of the presentations had articles with similar content published by authors from different departments worldwide since the original presentation.

Discussion

Specific topics presented at a surgical meeting will obviously illustrate current approaches or innovations but interrogation of a historical series of presentations at a conference will confirm or uncover evolving trends of more subtle contemporary issues.

This study revealed some anticipated data as in the host department was the primary contributing one and that approximately 85% of papers represented national units. Some institutions support the meeting year on year which also highlights their interest in promulgating clinical and scientific research. The most presented subspecialties of Head and Neck Oncology and Otology mirror the results from other colleagues while the Academic subgroup reflects the interests of the host clinician [2–4]. It is noteworthy to realise that papers on Head and Neck Malignancy were mostly presented by ORL-HNS departments with an increasing exclusivity as the years progressed. Adding the prevailing dominance of all abstracts from ORL-HNS in the only current national multidisciplinary Head and Neck meeting, it suggests a greater interest in clinical research for ORL-HNS in surgical oncology but also reflects the national trend for ENT to have a greater role in managing this clinical area. The source of Thyroid

papers is shared with General Surgery, demonstrating that even if historically thyroid management was handled by General Surgery, the trend has been for more ORL-HNS contributions, agreeing with concept of grey-zone interdisciplinary equalisation [8].

Despite the introduction of a seamless continuum in training, it is encouraging that SpRs are still involved and in combination with SHOs are the main contributors to the section. Nonetheless, these same changes could also explain the appearance of medical students and interns as presenters, since the more recent rate-limiting steps during training occur earlier in the career pathway. It is recognised that the presence of women in surgical practice has been increasing and although at a slightly slower rate, ORL-HNS is no exception [9]. Only one of the prior articles on ORL-HNS conferences examined female participation and our findings are consistent with their results revealing that the proportion of women presenters is increasing but that the overall number is still at a quarter of the male contributions [6].

Most active participants in a conference whether it is the presenters, co-authors or meeting organisers would welcome an increased publication rate but for almost 70% of contributors, presentation is the easier aspect and the final hurdle of a full article publication appears to just one step too far. The publication rate of abstracts presented was 27% which is disappointing but still within the admittedly wide range of 19 to 69% previously reported by other ORL-HNS meetings [1–3]. It is close to and better than the 2 years examined (19% and 24%) for BACO but well behind a study of similar numbers at 50.3% from analysis of a Scottish meeting [2, 4]. In time to publication, 67% of full-text articles were published within 2 years of presentation which is comparable to the medical literature [2, 4, 10]. Our sample illustrates that approximately 10% were published over 5 years after the meeting addressing an outstanding duration of follow-up issue raised by previous authors [4]. Notwithstanding the amount of times an article has to be rewritten to reach satisfactory criteria, it is noteworthy that a paper can be published over 5 years after presentation if it reaches acceptable standards [11]. The majority of publications were achieved by SpRs and SHOs while 4% were commendably delivered by medical students with the possible emergence of a trend towards more junior authors. The more presentations from an individual department also indicates the likelihood of more publications and the local unit was the source of most of the published articles (46%) with a publication rate of 33%. Likewise, the more presentations from a subspecialty mirrored the higher number of publications with Academic, Head and Neck Oncology and Otology roughly equivalent. Our data follows the lines of other ORL-HNS meetings where the highest percentage of published articles emanated from Head and Neck Surgical Oncology [2, 3].

Female otolaryngologists are increasing in number and they are consistently producing academic publications [6, 9]. The female publication rates in our survey are similar to the study on the US academy of OHNS [6]. Our data also demonstrates that women are more likely to persevere and have their work end up in peer-review journals as albeit only 24% of presentations were delivered by women, the female publication rate (22%) is not that dissimilar to male outcomes (28%). This suggests that female researchers are three times more likely to have their work published in peer-review journals.

The choice of journals for publishing the articles was quite diverse, with a total of 29 journals which probably confirms the multidisciplinary aspects of the presenters and topics. The journals with the most frequent publications, *Clinical Otolaryngology* and the *Journal of Laryngology and Otology* were the same as those from the Otorhinolaryngology Research Society and Scottish ENT meetings [3, 4]. The rate of similar articles published by different authors is data which to our knowledge has not been sought previously. A rate as high as 40% from separate institutions cannot be overlooked. This provides a compelling reason for completing the cycle of research with submission for publication as somebody else will always come up with the same idea at some stage.

This project was limited in that our search criteria may not have identified all publications or captured the as yet un-published ones. We did not analyse the levels of evidence of each abstract as the vast majority were clinical series. We did not address each of the subspecialty topics nor enquire as to why presenters did not publish their full articles. This has been assessed previously and thought be too difficult to obtain accurate or meaningful data retrospectively over such a long period of time [10].

Conclusion

This historical review of presentations at a surgical meeting named in honour of a French-trained Limerick surgeon-pioneer provides an insight into contemporary issues involving our specialty and lays down a number of markers or challenges for organisers and presenters alike. Some are more obvious or more recognised than others but are just as important to re-emphasise. Presentations on Head and Neck Malignancy have become almost exclusively ORL-HNS, while Thyroid presentations are becoming more valorised to General Surgery, and Facial Plastics with our colleagues in Plastic Surgery and Maxillofacial disciplines. More junior presenters are participating with an increasing female preponderance as the years have progressed. Our publication rate of 27% is similar to other ORL-HNS meetings but is at

the lower range while female trainees are much more likely to publish their work. Approximately 10% are published over 5 years after the meeting but presenters should endeavour to publish as soon as possible as others may develop the same idea and usurp publication in up to 40% of presentations.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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