

An international association of academic health centres



Governments around the world struggle with the challenges of providing good-quality health care, but knowledge on which to make sound rational decisions is in short supply. This lack of knowledge has presented a convincing case for a new organisational model that more closely links academic medicine and clinical practice. Academic medicine—along with its access to multiple disciplines, including the engineering, physical, and social sciences—holds a critical key to developing solutions to the challenges of effective health care. This alignment of academe and clinical care can realise what has become known as the virtuous cycle, whereby research, education, and clinical care are viewed as increasingly interdependent and as making each other better.¹ This trend is occurring in many parts of the world at a time when academic health centres are being increasingly recognised as major drivers of the economy² and as international patient-referral centres.³ The rapid globalisation of health care has accelerated this trend and offers a unique opportunity for such centres to work together to improve global health. At this important juncture of need and opportunity, these centres can position themselves as agents of change that personify the ideal that health care is crucial for a nation's welfare, as they work for both economic and societal progress.

In 2008, the Association of Academic Health Centers International (AAHC International) was created with such a mission.⁴ The association seeks to promote best practices, foster international relations, and enhance the missions of education, patients' care, and research. By bringing together leading international institutions and forging strong global partnerships with governmental agencies, industry, WHO, funding bodies, national academies, and philanthropists, the association will build a collaborative global community in academic health to seek solutions to pressing international health issues. AAHC International will also offer a platform as a thought leader to provide advice and guidance to leaders of academic health centres and their constituencies in areas such as: the organisation and management of academic health centres; collaborative research, education, and scholarship; policy development, including issues surrounding the global health workforce;

health-systems sharing for crucial issues (eg, ageing of the population, environmental health, ethnopharmacology and disease management, health-services research, surveillance, and public health); and development of exchange programmes for leaders and administrators.

This bringing together of academic health centres worldwide provides unprecedented opportunities for constructive collaboration. In research, for example, large clinical trials across academic health centres will be possible, with the sharing of research materials and expertise, the generation of large databases, and evaluation of important areas such as outcomes, patients' safety, and cost-efficacy. Clinically, the new organisation could mobilise the international academic community to combat the threat of, for example, an H1N1 pandemic.⁵ AAHC International could help facilitate threat-modelling to advise on issues such as school closures and clinical trials, search for important biomarkers, examine cytokine profiles and organ dysfunction in diverse populations, and study societal and bioethical issues to advise governments and international health organisations. The association will also enable the academic community to explore the potential for harmonisation of education and training programmes to prepare students and trainees for work in a global society. A key challenge for the new organisation will be to address the problem of health inequality, particularly in countries with underdeveloped health-care systems.⁶

This new international organisation of academic health centres will serve to mobilise and speak on behalf of their enormous collective strengths and resources, while helping to ensure that they can effectively contribute in international matters that affect health, research, and the economy. In so doing,

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AAHC International will help to foster an international community of academic health centres, a community driven by the ideal of improving the public good.

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We have attended several meetings about the establishment of AAHC International and are part of an informal steering group.

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- 2 Davies SM, Bennett A. Understanding the economic and social benefits of academic clinical partnerships. *Acad Med* 2008; **83**: 535–40.
- 3 Martin DR. Challenges and opportunities in the care of international patients: clinical and health services issues for academic medical centers. *Acad Med* 2006; **81**: 189–92.
- 4 AAHC International. <http://www.aahcdc.org/international.php> (accessed Aug 24, 2009).
- 5 Neumann G, Noda T, Kawaoka Y. Emergence and pandemic potential of swine-origin H1N1 influenza virus. *Nature* 2009; **459**: 931–39.
- 6 Gracey M, King M. Indigenous health part 1: determinants and disease patterns. *Lancet* 2009; **374**: 65–75.