Report from the 2015 IEA Congress

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Report from the 2015 IEA Congress

The International Ergonomics Association is an ‘association of associations’ embracing over 50 countries, and every three years holds an international congress for ergonomists and human factors specialists around the world.

This year’s congress was held in early August at the impressive Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre. Three members of CIEHF Council, Sarah Sharples, Roger Haslam and Patrick Watson, attended the event.

Sarah and Roger attended the two days of the IEA council meeting that preceded the congress. The discussions included the general operations and financial management of the IEA, as well as electing the senior officers for the next three years: Yusko Fujita (President), Kathleen Mesler (Vice President - Secretary General) and Jose Orlando Gomes (Vice President - Treasurer). The council meeting also included a very useful summary by each institute about the issues facing each national society.

It was very clear that the issues facing each society vary a lot — in some of the industrially developing countries there are still strong concerns about basic health and safety. In others, progress has been made introducing ergonomics & human factors into policy, but this itself presents challenges, both in terms of ensuring that sufficient trained ergonomists are available to deliver the work needed, and also in the change in attitude that this inclusion in policy brings, as there is a danger that the client will see ergonomics & human factors as a ‘tick box’ exercise.

Membership numbers around the world are varying — in general numbers are slightly down, primarily due to the economic climate, and there is a clear need to make sure that the societies offer value to members and to their countries. The CIEHF’s achievement of Chartered status and increased professionalism in our activities.

Each morning began with a keynote, which were all of an excellent standard. David Dunstan presented the state of the art on sedentary vs standing work while Gaur Gopal Ray gave a fascinating overview of the challenges of introducing ergonomics & human factors into communication design into a country as large and diverse as India.

Trent Victor, Senior Technical Leader Crash Avoidance at Volvo Cars described Volvo’s driverless car programme and their Vision2020 commitment that in five years time, “no one should be killed or seriously injured in or by a new Volvo car”.

The impact of the ageing population was addressed by Clas-Hakan Nygard who emphasised the value of the ageing workforce in terms of their experience. And finally, our own Professor Sue Hignett from Loughborough University, gave the keynote on Friday on ‘Healthcare Ergonomics: Reaching out into all areas of Clinical Practice’. Sue gave an excellent overview of her work in the design of work environments in healthcare settings, education for healthcare professionals and management of falls.

As well as the parallel sessions in the conference, we were all extremely busy leading workshops, meeting international colleagues and planning for future activities. We held editorial board meetings for the journals Ergonomics and Applied Ergonomics and Pat and Sarah supported Gaia Lupo from publishers Elsevier in leading a very successful workshop on how to write and review journal papers.

We also led and participated in several panel sessions, which went down particularly well at the conference. One highlight was the Human Factors in Complex Systems (HFICS) panel, which Sarah and Pat led with Peter Hancock from University of Central Florida, and Ann Williamson from the University of New South Wales. This panel, which followed on from the HFICS conference that the University of Nottingham and CIEHF held last year, was packed and sparked much lively debate about the value of models in human factors and the challenges in taking a systems approach in practical work settings. It also served as a great opportunity to publicise the forthcoming Human Factors in Complex Systems 2016 conference, one of two ergonomics & human factors conferences being hosted by the University of Nottingham next year.

One final privilege and cause for celebration were awards that were received by CIEHF members. Peter Hancock was honoured with two awards, the IEA/Elsevier John Wilson Award (along with Mitsuo Nagamachi and Gabriele Salvendy), which recognises major contributions in the field of applied ergonomics, and the IEA Triennial Award for Ergonomics Development. Don Chaffin, Maury Nussbaum and Richard So were all awarded IEA Fellowships.

Sarah was honoured to be able to receive the Liberty Mutual Award for best paper in ‘Applied Ergonomics’, which she accepted on behalf of Bob Muffett, John Wilson, Theresa Clarke, Anthony Coplestone, Emma Lowe, John Robinson, and Stuart Smith for their paper ‘Management of personal safety risk for lever operation in mechanical railway signal boxes’.

But of course, congresses such as this are not just about the formal elements. They are a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and collaborators, and to meet new ones.

It is very important that the CIEHF continues to participate in discussions about ergonomics & human factors on an international scale, and the IEA presents an excellent forum to achieve this. We look forward to the next IEA congress, in Florence, Italy, from 25th August to 1st September 2015.

Sarah Sharples, Roger Haslam & Pat Watson