

CONTINUING OUR PEACE-BUILDING MISSION: 2015 International Pediatric Emergency Medicine (IPEME) 12th Anniversary

Visitors to Canada have different experiences in applying for entry into the IPEME program. The selected participants of the 12th Annual International Pediatric Emergency Medicine (IPEME) of 2015 were, to say the least, very excited when they were chosen in March. Coming from both Canada and three regions in the Middle East, little did the participants imagine how meeting other medical students would affect them. The words “bringing together” as seen from the program’s web announcement, can either have a simple or challenging effect on a student, most especially if the only other nationals you know are those you hear from social media and to some extreme, those you meet at border checkpoints.

The 2015 IPEME was held from July 20 to August 14 2015. IPEME selects twelve (12) (three each) Canadian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian medical students to build bridges of peace through health education. The IPEME program is open to all Canadian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian medical students studying in their home countries. The CISEPO and IPEME team have, for many years, endeavoured to bring together these medical students to the wonderful possibilities of working and learning together.

A joint project of Canada International Scientific Exchange Program (CISEPO), the Department of Pediatric Emergency Medicine of the Hospital for Sick Children, McMaster University, University of Toronto and Mount Sinai Hospital, the IPEME program builds on the CISEPO model of implementing and strengthening bridges of peace in areas of conflict by acquiring the skills and confidence to promote peace and become agents of social change in their home countries and health communities. The project facilitates cross-border initiatives and cooperation among academic medical professionals and beyond.



The IPEME 2015 group, the CISEPO and IPEME Team at the program’s Meet and Greet session



2015 IPEME group before saying good-bye

Seated First Row: Front seated: Shaker Al-Azab; Kneeling next row (l to r): Rofael Jabr, Dr Rahim Valani-Prog Director-Curriculum, Hama Baqaeen, Michelle Gold and Emaan A l-Jarrah;
 Standing: (l to r) Carmel Levin, Omar Shunnar, Ditas Reyes-CISEPO Manager, Mohammad Obeidallah, Mohammed Zaanona, Dr Shawna Novak-CISEPO Director, Yara Jeries, Nir Meller, Inbal Golomb, Tyson Savage, Jimin Lee, Dr Harpreet Gill-Volunteer Resident Coordinator and Dr Omar Al-Haj, visiting alumnus from IPEME 2010.

Behind the scenes, the IPEME program connects at least 28 dedicated and experienced medical professors and specialists with the IPEME participants. Each year, these professionals continue to heighten the students' awareness and curiosity with well-developed and relevant insights of the workings of the health care systems in both the Middle East and Canada. The IPEME program curriculum directly impacts its participants through their exposure to the various aspects of emergency medicine, conflict resolutions, leadership development, global health, pediatric respiratory, haematological and neurological emergencies, children's mental health in the regions of conflict, and health in general as a vehicle to achieve peace.

Arranging the travel of the students between March and July was a great deal more than an administrative intent. It meant working during Middle East hours, with frequent follow-ups. To facilitate the Canadian entry visas of the medical students from Gaza, the West Bank and Amman, CISEPO teamed up for five months with the Representative Office of Canada to the Palestinian Authority located in Ramallah. A surge of telephone calls and email exchanges transpired with the

immigration officials at the Cairo Canadian embassy, the Jordan Canadian embassy, the Tel Aviv Canadian embassy and its border authorities and the New York Canadian General Consul office. In June, a letter of refusal did not deter our Palestinian participant. The Representative Office accommodated CISEPO's plea for intervention and remarkably did their best to re-open the visa application in order to bring the Gaza student to Canada in time for the IPEME sessions. The process was anything but simple. CISEPO is grateful for their professional and generous support during the five months of coordination with CISEPO. Though our Palestinian participant from Gaza was 3 days late into the program, it was a memorable victory both for the Gaza medical student and the program.

From April to June, Director Dr Seetha Radhakrishnan and her staff at the Visiting Electives office of the University of Toronto had extended their faithful and patient assistance to CISEPO and the IPEME participants in their application to the Association of Faculty of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) student portal, a brand new application process for Canadian and international students applying for visiting electives. Within the same period, the staff at the Sick Kids Hospital have diligently worked with the U of T Visiting Electives office to complete the Emergency department shift schedule for the participants and for this we express our appreciation.

CISEPO thanks University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine Dean Trevor Young and the Academic and Campus Events (ACE) group, for arranging to secure a classroom for the program's entire 4-week sessions. We thank Dean Howard Hu for kindly accommodating the IPEME students at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health location and the assistance of an IT technician.

At the program's closing ceremony, Dean Howard Hu graced the occasion with his Welcome speech to the students and the program team. Before saying good-bye, Dr Arnold Noyek delivered his heartfelt and very encouraging parting words. To the students and all of us present, he said: *"...we have learned from you and you have inspired us...."*

Inbal Golomb, an Israeli participant from the Sackler School of Medicine of Tel Aviv University, described IPEME 2015: *"I can't put into words what an incredible experience it was and I want to say thank you for everything."*

"IPEME may be the most unique and valuable experience in my medical education to date. Despite our diverse cultural backgrounds and languages as a group, our common passion for medicine made it easy for us to relate, communicate, and learn from each other from the very moment we first met as a group. I have no doubt that we will all be better health care professionals as a result of the time we spent together in IPEME." - Tyson Savage, Canadian participant from Queens University.

The CISEPO and IPEME teams have been renewed in their resolve to continue its mission to build a new generation of leaders in pediatric medicine and global health through the program's professional and academic solutions for peace. This year's students demonstrated their resolve to take home with them a new outlook in peacebuilding by assuming a new posture in transforming preconceived relationships of fear to mutual respect and better understanding.

The IPEME program is funded by the Kavelman-Fonn Foundation and other donors.