

The Confederation of Meningitis Organisations celebrates the successful conclusion of its 2008 round of grant awards to members.

In 2008 CoMO awarded its first ever grants to members in support of projects which would promote awareness of meningitis and septicaemia and to help small organizations to fulfill their missions.

Nine grants were awarded to members in Australia, Ireland, Italy, Taiwan, USA, and UK for a wide range of imaginative projects which covered awareness campaigns to targeted groups, production and distribution of specialized DVDs, building websites, production and distribution of specifically targeted literature, hosting of a conference on meningitis control and prevention and activities in the community. A further grant was awarded for a scientific research project in Tanzania.

The Meningitis Centre in Perth, Western Australia used their grant to extend the frequency and reach of their press-based campaign which generated significant extra calls to their Centre and visits to their website during the period June to October, which is the peak season for meningitis cases in Australia.

In Ireland the Meningitis Trust produced and distributed a “Home from Hospital” leaflet for patients leaving hospital after meningitis. There is no follow-up of such patients in Ireland and this initiative has been an effective and efficient way to inform this vulnerable group about the services offered by Meningitis Trust Ireland

The Italian Parents Movement – Moige – used their grant to carry out a web-based awareness campaign on their National Meningitis Vaccine Prevention Observatory. This web portal www.prevenzionemeningite.it has the objective of monitoring the vaccine policies in Italy and offers parents an information service along with interactive IT tools.

In Taiwan the grant helped the Pneumo-Mening Centre to host a conference on meningitis control and prevention. More than 100 physicians, nurses and public health workers listen to talks on pneumococcal meningitis, pneumonia and the cost-effectiveness of vaccination. The Centre also conducted an experience campaign to educate people about the devastating the after-effects of meningitis and septicaemia in which around 50 people took part.

The National Meningitis Association in Georgia, USA, produced and distributed their award-winning DVD “Getting It ... A Disease, A Vaccine” into schools in Washington, DC. There are almost 77,000 students in this school system and the aim was to make the DVD and the user’s guide part of the health and science curriculum so that the information filtered through the families to younger children not yet in school. The DVD can be viewed on their website www.nmaus.org.

In Wisconsin, USA, the Becky Werner Meningitis Foundation targets high school students. They used their grant to expand the reach of their organization and increase attendance at their talks by advertising. They also were able to upgrade their website www.stampoutmeningitis.com and to develop World Meningitis Day initiatives in their area.

The Meningitis Research Foundation in the United Kingdom also used their grant to target students – in the case those in university - who are the second highest group at risk for meningococcal disease in the UK. The Foundation produced new posters and wall-planners as well as utilizing technology for social networking. Their campaign also raised international awareness because one in eight students in UK universities come from outside of the country.

Also in the UK, the Meningitis Trust produced a DVD illustrating and highlighting the professional services provided by the Trust for those who have suffered from meningitis and septicemia. With over 500,000 people in the UK who have had these diseases and many more people in their families and friend affected by them, reaching these people is a key goal, so this DVD will be used by staff, supporters and community organizations to help achieve that goal.

The grant to Meningitis UK helped this organization to develop an interactive quiz and symptoms puzzle on their website www.meningitisuk.org. To date 1700 people have taken part in the quiz and received immediate feedback and summary information. Results will be reviewed and will help to inform the future educational and awareness activities of the organization. Meningitis UK also used their grant to develop an "Ask the Expert" chat facility on their website www.meningitisuk.org/about-meningitis/ask-the-expert.htm - the first session went live in October.

Finally, the first scientific research project funded by CoMO was carried out by Prof. Robert Booy of the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance in Sydney, Australia. The study aimed to determine the carriage of pneumococcal bacteria among HIV-infected children and their caregivers in Tanzania to assess the potential benefit of pneumococcal vaccination. This grant helped to support a junior medical researcher, thus training the next generation of investigators while promoting awareness of an appalling problem – that children with HIV/AIDS have an extraordinarily high rate of disease and death from invasive pneumococcal disease.

The applications process for the 2009 grant round is now closed and CoMO is confident that the high standards achieved by its members in 2008 will be repeated by the new award holders who will be announced by the end of the year.

Chris Head – Chair, CoMO small grants committee.