Report – The 2017 EALTHY Conference

Mike Guest,

University of Miyazaki

Did you know that JASMEE has an equivalent organization in Europe? It’s called EALTHY (the European Association of Language Teachers for Healthcare) and the 3rd annual EALTHY Conference was recently held, Oct. 27-28th, 2017 in Bern, Switzerland.

The venue was the Berner Bildungzentrum Pflege, a highly-regarded nursing college near the center of Bern, which proved to be a perfectly suitable venue for this intimate conference. It was my first time attending to the conference and I found it to be exceptionally well-organized and welcoming (hey, isn’t that what we expect of Switzerland?).

Attendees numbered just over 100 but covered a range of 24 countries (4 from Japan, including myself). This number made networking, always a major feature of conferences, much more feasible. The concurrent sessions (one of which I presented) were held in 3 rooms, making sure that there was always a healthy number of participants/audience on hand, many of whom were extremely knowledgeable in the field of medical English practice and education. I felt I had to be on my conferencing ‘A’ game here to make a positive impression.

What struck me most was that almost all of the presentations, discussions, and workshops I attended were of a high standard, not only in terms of presentation skills but also in terms of being well-researched and/or having stimulating contents. Presenters and participants included not only EMP teachers, but also medical translators, interpreters, healthcare workers, and field researchers. Domains ranged from standard Doctor-Patient scenarios to emergency care practices to healthcare services for refugees.

Also included in the program was a poster session and a ‘Hot Tips for Teachers’ session in which 12 presenters, including myself, had to briefly outline a successful EMP classroom activity within three minutes, before the next speaker immediately sprung into action. On-site lunches and snacks were plentiful (a lot of cheese and chocolate, to nobody’s surprise) and a conference dinner was held (not attended by yours truly, thanks to the muscle of the Swiss Franc).

Hearing English used an academic and professional lingua franca by so many non-native English speakers was inspiring. It was perhaps apropos then that the plenary speaker was Prof. Jennifer Jenkins, arguably the leading figure in the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) movement. Prof. Jenkins’ plenary was bookended by an amusing closing presentation, a series of telling clinical communication vignettes, by Dr. John Skelton, Professor of Clinical Communication at the University of Birmingham.

Hats off to EALTHY organizers and leaders Ros Wright and Catherine Richards for the success of the conference and the growth of the organization as a whole. JASMEE members looking to expand their horizons in medical English education may want to attend the next conference (to be held in 2019 – the conferences are bi-annual – at a yet undetermined locale) or join the organization. Their website can be found at:

http://www.ealthy.com/