International Society for Quality in Health Care

ISQua endeavours to improve patient outcomes worldwide by seeking to enhance the quality and safety of healthcare services. CEO Peter Carter tells International Innovation about the Society’s focus on developing novel ways to effectively deliver health services – particularly in low- and middle-income countries – and the importance of its expert global network to achieve this goal.

What is the overarching mission of the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua)?

ISQua aims to inspire, promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and safety of healthcare worldwide. The main focus of ISQua’s mission is to provide an international perspective on healthcare quality and safety improvement. This global context enables the 100 countries with which we work to understand their particular issues from a range of different perspectives. ISQua seeks to assist countries and world regions to arrive at the most appropriate solutions at a local level.

Could you outline your professional background and explain how you came to join the Society?

I have a background in university teaching and management in the healthcare sector and have been working for over 20 years in healthcare quality and safety within a specialist postgraduate medical college environment and through private consulting. From there I moved into the global healthcare arena through ISQua.

How does ISQua ensure the safety and quality of care providers and facilities worldwide?

While it is one of ISQua’s objectives to enhance the quality and safety of healthcare globally, it is not possible for any organisation or government to ensure quality and safety at all times. As ISQua’s principal aim is to improve outcomes for patients, it is hoped that in achieving this the healthcare environment will be enhanced.

Through its International Accreditation Programme (IAP), ISQua accredits external evaluation organisations around the world and helps them to improve their performance. These organisations in turn work with groups and services at a local level in their own countries and elsewhere, and can use what they have learnt from the IAP to enhance their own programmes.

What are some of the biggest healthcare challenges the Society is dealing with at present?

At the moment, one ISQua focus is on the consequences of an ageing population, and we endeavour to address what will become an unaffordable healthcare system within 20 years by encouraging new approaches to the delivery of its services. The challenges in healthcare quality and safety for low- and middle-income countries – as evidenced at present by the Ebola crisis – is also a major concern for us. And, ISQua is seeking to highlight that the current practice of approaching healthcare through addressing episodes of care needs to be replaced with a focus on the continuum of care, or what we refer to as the ‘patient journey’, which should include embracing the patient as a partner in their own care.

Can you provide an insight into some of ISQua’s most important partnerships?

ISQua places great importance on global networking. As an organisation that is small in financial terms but has a huge worldwide presence, the Society can only meet its responsibilities through an effective international network. ISQua has multiple partners across the world that contribute to its various programmes, all of which are significant in their own way. Current partnerships are with the World Health Organization (WHO), International Hospital Federation, Canadian Healthcare Association, Institute for Healthcare Improvement and The Health Foundation, among many others.
How does the ISQua Fellowship Programme work?

It is an online learner-led programme for professional development that is designed to improve participants’ competencies and confidence by providing them with access to a global community of experts through a range of educational offerings. In addition to providing an international context within this programme, it is important that local and regional issues are also addressed, hence ISQua has established partnerships in various regions of the world with the Fellowship Programme. Currently, the programme is offered in Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and Portuguese in regions across Asia, Europe, South America, Australasia, Africa, North America and the Middle East – and we intend to continue its expansion.

Could you discuss the Distinguished Service Award and its recent recipients?

The ISQua Distinguished Service Award recognises significant contributions to the work of the Society or specific activities that facilitate healthcare quality and safety. Recently, the award was given to Paul vanOstenberg in recognition of his outstanding leadership in developing and implementing accreditation standards for over 20 years, and for being instrumental in advancing standards specifically in low- and middle-income countries. It was fitting that vanOstenberg received this award while he was engaged with an ISQua accreditation visit to Argentina. In 2012, the award was given to Helene Beaard for outstanding contributions to ISQua’s IAP.

What benefits are associated with membership of the Society?

To become a member of ISQua is to join a global network that is making a difference in quality and safety in healthcare across the world. Members of ISQua are patient safety champions who are part of an international community working together to enhance the wellbeing of patients. They are provided with educational resources to improve knowledge as well as support for professional development through attendance at conferences and meetings.

2015 priorities

In 2015, ISQua will be focusing on six key areas:

- Encouraging innovation and systems change
- Expanding the ISQua Fellowship Programme to include an international master’s degree
- Advancing health information technology
- Improving patient safety and patient-centred care
- Growing activities in global standards for external evaluation organisations
- Making a difference in developing countries

How is the work conducted by ISQua and its partners being disseminated?

Dissemination is being conducted in a variety of ways. Primarily, we rely on our partners’ extensive networks to distribute and promote our information and activities. We also hold regional meetings and respond to requests for advice by providing experts to assist with particular projects. Additionally, we host an annual international conference, which attracts 1,200 abstracts and over 1,000 delegates from 75 countries. Following ISQua’s formation in 1985, one of the organisations early decisions was to establish the International Journal for Quality in Healthcare, which has been published for nearly 30 years and is regarded as one of the principal scientific journals in healthcare quality and safety.

ISQua is holding its 32nd international conference ‘Building Quality and Safety into the Healthcare System’ on 4-7 October 2015 in Doha, Qatar