
COVID-19 Forces Healthcare Congresses Cancellations



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COVID-19 cases continue to be reported daily and the virus has spread to 75 countries. What impact is it having on the healthcare sector?

One key concern is the shortage of personal protective equipment putting the [health of frontline workers](#) dealing with infected patients [at risk](#). Supplies of gloves, medical masks, respirators, goggles, face shields, gowns and aprons are rapidly depleting in spite of WHO shipping half a million sets of such equipment to 47 countries.

You might also like: [HIMSS Cancelled Due to Coronavirus Concerns](#).

Healthcare providers have been [deploying technology such as robots and telemedicine](#) in order to treat the virus with minimal contact between patient and healthcare staff. Specialist areas, such as radiology, have established communities for professionals to share case studies on diagnosing the virus.

But the healthcare space has gone one step further in the fight against COVID-19; organisers are cancelling important annual meetings in an effort to contain the virus. Other large-scale healthcare events have seen major industry participants pulling out in the face of the virus spread.

Dr Immanuel Azaad Moonesar, Associate Professor, Health Administration & Policy at the [Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, UAE](#), has just visited the World Health Organization-EMRO meeting in Amman, Jordan, on Social Determinants of Health. He considers cancellations of healthcare events around the world a good and diligent precautionary measure giving an example of a nationwide recommendation from the UAE authorities to suspend all overseas student and staff trips across educational institutions due the coronavirus outbreak. "It is paramount to take all possible measures to protect the health and wellbeing of the staff, students, trainees and clients," he said in a comment. "Continuous monitoring of the situation and keeping ourselves updated with relevant official government alerts and announcements is crucial. We have to be calm and ready," he stressed.

Europe

In Europe, at least a few medical and scientific societies have already [suspended](#) their upcoming meetings, and European Society of Anaesthesiology has [cancelled](#) the second day of their two-day Patient Safety Policy Summit in Brussels (3-4 March). In France gatherings over 5,000 people are temporarily [banned](#). The UK government has [launched](#) the Coronavirus action plan and warned that it might ask businesses to consider more home working and discourage unnecessary travel.

This week, the European Society of Radiology (ESR) [announced](#) the postponement of [ECR](#), the leading European imaging congress scheduled to take place in Vienna, Austria from March 11 to 15.

Boris Brkljačić, ESR President said the body had been monitoring WHO updates and following recommendations from the Austrian health authorities for large-scale events. He said ESR could not fulfil official protective requirements and guarantee a safe congress for participants and industry partners.

"The safety, health and well-being of our delegates and partners will always be the highest priority for the ESR," Brkljačić said.

In the run up to the postponement announcement, ECR acknowledged that some delegates would not be willing or able to travel because of COVID-19, and issued a reminder that the event would be available for online access as a telecongress.

In Austria, 37 cases have been confirmed to date. ECR has been postponed until July.

An upcoming [eHealthWeek Croatia](#) conference in Rovinj has also been cancelled, according to an email statement from the American Health Information Management Association ([AHIMA](#)) that co-organises the event. "Given the rapidly evolving situation with COVID-19, we encourage healthcare leaders to remain home and focus on managing the needs of their communities. It is our responsibility to always prioritise the safety, health and welfare of our participants and staff. We have made this difficult decision with an abundance of caution and consideration," the statement said.

It is noted that invitation-only part of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (HR PRES) programme, including one-day High Level Meeting on e-Health as the main event and two-days e-Health Network Meeting as the side event, might be moved to Zagreb on the same dates (15-17 April, 2020), or new dates in May or June.

USA

In the United States 11 deaths have been linked to the virus so far, with 150 confirmed cases across the country. Most medical conferences in the country are moving forward as planned with few exceptions, such as the 2020 [World Patient Safety, Science & Technology Summit](#) that should have begun today, 6 March, in California, and has been postponed until further notice.

"We all believe in, 'First, do no harm,'" said the organisers, the Patient Safety Movement Foundation ([PSMF](#)) in an emailed statement. "In light of the unknowns and knowns about the Coronavirus, we feel that we have no choice but to ensure that we, the Patient Safety Movement Foundation, 'First, do no harm.'"

"The determining factor was that we at PSMF every day ask leaders to take big steps to ensure patient safety in their own facilities and we really felt like we had to walk the walk too and live up to our values and principles to do what is best for patient care, all the time. Our Board of Directors made the ultimate decision, unanimously," Ariana Longley, MPH, Chief Operating Officer (PSMF), explained.

In lieu of the event, on 6 March the PSMF is organising a webinar about "What's the latest on COVID-19." It will be led by Ms Donna Prosser, DNP, RN, NE-BC, FACHE, BCPA – Chief Clinical Officer of PSMF. Registration link is available [here](#).

Another major event [cancelled](#) – for the first time in 58 years – is [HIMSS20](#), which was to take place on 9-13 March. Hal Wolf, president and CEO of HIMSS, [called](#) it "an unacceptable risk to bring so many thousands of people together in Orlando next week." The inability to accurately assess the potential reach of the virus was cited as one of the reasons. The organisers also stressed that since attendees' profiles are mostly healthcare related, their potential exposure to the virus put disproportionate risk on healthcare system.

Middle East

In the Middle East, the virus has spread to the majority of countries including UAE, Kuwait, Iraq, Morocco and Egypt among others. Iran has been affected the most, with over 100 deaths and more than 3,500 confirmed cases.

Although many healthcare events in the region proceed as planned, in Saudi Arabia, which has two confirmed cases so far, the Patient Experience Excellence Congress ([PXXC](#)), originally scheduled for 15-18 March, has been postponed till June. The organisers, BII World, have made the decision in consultation with strategic partners and government stakeholders including Ministry of Health Saudi Arabia. "We are in discussion with Ministry of Health Saudi Arabia regarding the exact dates in June," BII World said in an emailed statement. "We regret the inconvenience caused, but we would like to follow all precautionary measures to ensure that the event is delivered in most favourable conditions offering satisfactory protection against any potential health and safety repercussions." (UPDATE 9/03: New dates confirmed – 8-11 June)

Future Uncertainty

Similarly, the futures of many sporting and cultural events, including the [Tokyo 2020 Olympics](#) and Formula-1, are uncertain owing to the COVID-19 crisis.

Most organisers of health-related events have put out statements to their attendees saying that they are monitoring the situation and will adapt as necessary. However, in social media, some of those who do plan to attend express their dissatisfaction with such indecisiveness, especially in light of travel plans disruptions as a result of late cancellations.

COVID-19 broke out in December in China. At the time of publication, there are 95,512 reported cases, 3,286 deaths (mostly in mainland China) and 53,695 recoveries.

This week, WHO said that the mortality rate around the globe was 3.4%.

Other cancelled/postponed events

[Hospital Infrastructure Show 2020](#), Kuwait: rescheduled from 4-7 March to 7-10 October.

[CMEF Indonesia](#), Jakarta, Indonesia: rescheduled from 11-13 March to 1-3 July.

[Future of Individualized Medicine 2020](#), San Diego, CA, USA: originally scheduled for 12-13 March, cancelled.

[52nd IDKD 2020 – International Diagnostic Course](#), Davos, Switzerland: rescheduled from 22-26 March to 30 August 30 – 3 September.

[World Congress on Primary Healthcare](#), Dubai, UAE: rescheduled from 23-25 March to 23-24 November.

[Medlab Asia/Asia Health 2020](#): rescheduled from 24-26 March, Singapore, to 28-30 October, Thailand.

[Geneva Health Forum 2020](#), Switzerland: rescheduled from 24-27 March to 16-18 November.

[RCOG World Congress](#), Oman: originally scheduled for 25-28 March, new date TBC.

[2nd International Conference on Pediatrics and Primary Healthcare Nursing](#), UAE: rescheduled from 26-27 March, Abu Dhabi, to 10-11 December Dubai.

[SG-ANZICS 2020 Asia Pacific Intensive Care Forum](#), Singapore: originally scheduled for 2-6 April, cancelled.

[China International Medical Equipment Fair](#) (CMEF), Shanghai: rescheduled from 9-12 April to 3-6 June.

UPDATE: [40th ISICEM Congress](#), Brussels, Belgium: [rescheduled](#) from 24-27 March to 15-18 September

UPDATE: [16th Emirates Critical Care Conference 2020](#), Dubai, UAE: rescheduled from 2-4 April to 3-5 September.

UPDATE: [AORN Global Surgical Conference 2020](#), Anaheim, USA: originally scheduled for 28 March – 1 April, cancelled

UPDATE: [ISN World Congress of Nephrology 2020](#), Abu Dhabi, UAE: originally scheduled for 26-29 March, TBC

UPDATE: [ENDO 2020](#), San Francisco CA, USA: originally scheduled for 28-31 March, cancelled

Source: ESR, WHO, PSMF, BII World, HIMSS

Image credit:

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