



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF HIP AND KNEE SURGEONS

Safety First: Executing a Hybrid Event for a Healthcare Audience

Overview

This case study will examine why the [American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons \(AAHKS\)](#) decided to move forward with their 30th Annual Meeting as a hybrid event, how they executed and the valuable lessons learned.

Background

There is undeniable value with in-person meetings, especially for an association of surgeons whose livelihood depends on hands-on interaction. Although COVID-19 disrupted plans for the annual meeting, AAHKS members still expressed a preference for a live event over virtual one in order to be able to handle new medical devices and surgical instruments.

Due to the safety concerns of a regular live event, the planning team instead decided to move forward with a hybrid event model.

Having worked with Hilton Anatole for the past five years, the AAHKS planning team felt confident that the hotel's well-established cleanliness protocols for event experiences (Hilton EventReady with CleanStay) would deliver an exceptional hybrid program, making sure the health and safety of guests was priority.

Mike Zarski, Executive Director of AAHKS explained: *"We've been at this facility [Hilton Anatole] for several years, and we're very familiar with the layout of the hotel as well as the staff's ability to deliver, so we had a lot of historic confidence and trust in Hilton. As we thought about hosting in 2020, their increased cleaning protocols and contract flexibility helped us make the decision that we could—in fact—conduct a hybrid meeting this year and do it safely."*

Method

The decision to move forward with a hybrid event model, that included in-person attendees from Dallas, was based on a comprehensive assessment of the event venue, as well as the attendees' ability to comply with all mandates and guidelines from the CDC, Texas, Dallas County and the consulting infectious disease specialist's guidance and judgment.

To ensure the safety of every attendee, the hybrid event relied on source control (social distancing, masks), symptom monitoring (temperature checks, queries from symptom checklists), and a detailed health and safety plan available on the meeting website. For those attending virtually, an online help form was created to assist with any technology troubleshooting during the event.

Click [here](#) for a comprehensive view of the health and safety plan, complete with guidelines for:

- Pre-event communication
- Meeting space considerations
- Health considerations
- Registration
- Table and seating guidelines
- Meal functions
- Staff guidelines
- Virtual audience
- Post-event

In addition to health and safety information, the annual meeting website included resources for virtual attendees, including an online help form to assist with technology troubleshooting during the event.

AAHKS was advised by outside counsel that conducting the hybrid Annual Meeting did not expose them to any special, unique or additional liability, nor did the attendees need to sign waivers.

AAHKS recognized that many members faced institutional or state restrictions, such as 14-day quarantines, if they travelled out of state, and some members felt uncomfortable traveling or attending gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the same registration fee, AAHKS members could either attend in person or attend virtually, with no penalty for switching from live to virtual or back again to live. Similar in-person/virtual options were offered to exhibitors.

The Annual Meeting took place over four days, with program content including industry symposiums with moderators, a keynote speaker presentation, the AAHKS awards presentation, general session speakers, Q&A with experts, research poster and paper presentations and networking sessions. All content, gatherings and networking opportunities included virtual attendee features and options.

Results

The event drew almost 400 in-person attendees from 37 different states and three countries, while nearly 1,000 attendees attended virtually.

After the event, feedback was gathered from attendees about the health and safety measures taken, and what drove certain attendees to choose a virtual vs in-person experience.

Survey highlights include:

- 99% of in-person attendees AGREE Health and safety measures were carried out effectively
- 96% were happy they attended in person
- 96% were happy they attended virtually (but many commented they prefer live)
- When asked, “**why did you attend in person?**” responses overwhelming centered on the live events offering a better learning environment.

Conclusion

Overall, the hybrid 30th AAHKS Annual Meeting achieved its educational and research objectives, sustained the members' affinity for their association and provided experience that will shape the conference beyond the pandemic.

The following were identified as WINS:

- Creating a robust health and safety plan (see Appendix) that integrated Hilton EventReady with CleanStay
- Partnering with an event production team that seamlessly integrated live stage presentations with remote speakers, recorded presentations and interactivity among remote/on-site speakers and in-person/virtual attendees
- Choosing a robust meeting app that facilitated a paperless/touchless experience, interactivity and pushed messaging regarding safety

The following were identified as LESSONS LEARNED and BEST PRACTICES:

- Understand what public health restrictions are in place in the meeting location. Some jurisdictions limit the number of attendees, others limit the maximum capacity of meeting space.
- Understand the capabilities of the meeting venue and key service providers. Hotels have laid-off staff, shut down restaurants; convention service companies have also downsized their staff.
- Implementing a health and safety plan requires additional organizational resources
- Review budgetary and financial viability, as expenses may be greater and revenue from exhibitors or attendees lower

Resources

To view the Health and Safety Plan click [here](#).