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Message from the President

Joe Leigh Simpson, MD, FACOG, FACMG
President, IFFS

The 2016 triennial IFFS World Congress is upon us – September 21-25, with pre-congress courses occurring on September 21 and 22. There are many “firsts” for this congress. To be held in New Delhi, this is the first truly international OB-GYN Congress in India. The IFFS thus has the global spotlight.

The Indian Society for Assisted Reproduction (ISAR) and the Indian Fertility Society (IFS) have painstakingly prepared and are highly focused on these final few months.

The IFFS 2016 World Congress will, as always, have memorable keynote addresses. This year we will hear Diagnostic Advances in Reproductive Medicine through Genomics (Aleksandar Rajkovic), Stem Cells (Kwang Yul Cha), and Mitochondria Transfer (Alison Murdoch). The famous IFFS trilogies (3 speakers per topic) will return with speakers well distributed globally, and there will be our usual, generous number of submitted abstracts and resulting presentations. A novel addition for IFFS 2016 will be a daily offering of three concurrent sessions at each of which ISAR and IFS will present the best from our Indian colleagues.

To increase enthusiasm for the event in Asia, recent IFFS and member society workshops have included: Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine (Manilla), Pacific Society of Reproductive Medicine with the Korean Society for Reproductive Medicine (Seoul), Chinese Society of Reproductive Medicine (Beijing). Of special note was the first workshop in Yangon, Myanmar, spearheaded by the IFFS Scientific Director Tina Buchholz, and held in conjunction with the Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of the Myanmar Medical Association and Myanmar Deputy Minister of Health, Thein Thein Htay opened the meeting. An enthusiastic audience of 150 heard up to date talks on reproductive genetics, ovulation stimulation and good ART laboratory practices. Speakers included IFFS officers and Board member K.K. Iswaran (Malaysian Society OB-GYN), the latter underscoring involvement of Southeast Asian societies.

Given the uniqueness of this ground breaking meeting in India and the IFFS being a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), the WHO will be present in force. Just recently IFFS 2012 -2015 activities were approved by the WHO, as have our plans for 2016-2018. At IFFS 2016, the WHO will run a dedicated trilogy and help us to launch the 8th IFFS Surveillance. Under Editor Steven J. Ory, the Surveillance is a major deliverable from our 60 member societies to the WHO, covering fertility care regulations, guidelines and practices country by country.

This being my last IFFS Presidential Letter, I extend my gratitude to many: our fabulous Secretariat (Charles Sapp, Deborah Berkowitz, Gerri Mahn), my fellow elected officers, representatives from elected member societies who serve on the Board of Directors, our Scientific and Educational Directors and Associate Directors, and the many IFFS committee members. That IFFS is thriving is due to these colleagues. It has truly been a privilege to serve as your President.

Thank you.
Workshops

Joint IFFS/PSRM ART Workshop in Manila

Rudie Frederick B. Mendiola | President, PSRM, 2015

The IFFS held a workshop in partnership with the Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine (PSRM) on November 23, 2015 in Manila, Philippines. The objective of the workshop was to update fellows in reproductive medicine on the different aspects of assisted reproductive technology. Seventy-seven active infertility specialists attended the event.

The faculty was headed by Joe Leigh Simpson, President of the IFFS, who gave a lecture on the Outcomes of ART. He was accompanied by Richard Kennedy, President Elect of the IFFS, who gave lectures on Ovarian Stimulation and Luteal Phase Management, Minimizing the Risk of Multiple Pregnancy and Quality and Safety in the ART Laboratory. Tina Buchholz, IFFS Scientific Director, spoke on the Assessment of the Infertile Couple and Indications for ART and Pre Implantation Screening and Diagnosis. Last but not least, Edgar Mocanu, IFFS Treasurer, talked on Prevention and Management of OHSS and Egg Retrieval and Embryo Transfer – Tips and Tricks.

The last part of the workshop involved a lively discussion of sample ART cases. Several cases were presented. After which, questions were answered by the different groups. Topics discussed were practical and useful yet some were controversial. It was the perfect end to a very fruitful workshop.

The workshop was well appreciated and praised by the attendees. We look forward to continued collaborations with the IFFS.

Fertivision 2015 Annual Conference

Sonia Malik | President, The Indian Fertility Society (IFS)

There has been a steadily growing interest in the subject of infertility in India in the last two decades. The Indian Fertility Society (IFS) was established in 2005 to promote exchange amongst physicians practicing the subject. Our annual conference, Fertivision, is held each year in December in order to showcase the progress of the society, enable members to present their work and interact with one another.

Our most recent conference began on December 4, 2015 with seven pre congress courses. With over 1700 registrations, Fertivision once again lived up to its reputation! The conference was inaugurated by Sh Bhanu Pratap Sec Health Govt of India to a packed house. We were to proud to have Dr Richard Kennedy, President Elect IFFS, and Dr Prakash Trivedi, President FOGSI as Guests of Honour amongst us. 2015 Lifetime Achievement Awards were given to two stalwarts who had contributed immensely towards women’s health and particularly reproductive medicine. IFS was proud to confer these prestigious awards upon Dr CN Purandare, FIGO President, and Lt Gen (Dr) Puneeta Arora. Awards were also given to the Best Fellow Dr Simarandeep Kaur and for the first time the Best Chapter Award was given to the UP Chapter for their excellent performance not only in academics but also during the membership drive. Panel discussions and free papers gave a chance to the young talent of IFS. Awards for the best papers clinical and embryology were given in the valedictory. IFS congratulates the winners for their brilliant performance.

The IFS gratefully acknowledges the support of the IFFS in our meeting. We are indebted to Dr Richard Kennedy and IFFS Treasurer, Dr Edgar Mocanu for making the meeting a success. While Dr Richard Kennedy also conducted a workshop on QC & QA, both the officers deliberated in a special IFFS Symposium.

The trade exhibition generated lots of interest and IFS thanks the industry for its whole hearted participation and efforts to make Fertivision a grand success.

Active participation from the delegates and our world renowned international faculty, and an equally brilliant national faculty, made Fertivision a rollicking success.
Long walk to IVF freedom in Costa Rica

María Teresa Urbina | President, REDLARA

THE BAN - Costa Rica was the only country in the world where In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) was forbidden. It was legal between 1995 and 2000. The Costa Rican Institute of Fertility (ICI, for its Spanish acronym) in San José, headed by Drs. Gerardo Escalante and Delia Ribas, was the only clinic that provided IVF during that time, though practicing under extremely restrictive guidelines, which placed such limits as the following: 1) restricted to only married heterosexual couples, 2) a maximum of 6 eggs could be inseminated, 3) all embryos formed were required to be transferred, and 4) no cryopreservation permitted. Only twelve families had the privilege of solving their infertility problem, before the prohibition.

The Constitutional Chamber of the Costa Rican Supreme Court of Justice invoked the right to life, expressed in the Costa Rican Constitution and the American Convention on Human Rights, to prohibit IVF, in March 2000. “The state makes a mistaken interpretation of the right to life, treating a fertilized egg as a person: in fact, not all embryos result in a newborn,” says Gerardo Escalante, director of the ICI. (1)

This ban affected the right of infertile couples to decide to seek treatment, which would allow them to have biological children and develop their life projects. Since then, infertile couples have faced a long walk to IVF freedom.

THE TRIAL - In January 2001, the ICI organized forces among their patient population. Of them, ten infertile couples affected by this resolution and represented by their untiring legal counsel, Dr. Gerardo Trejos, presented a petition denouncing human rights violations due to the ban before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH, for its Spanish acronym).

After this, several activities were conducted to support the infertile population. One of the most relevant (because of its international character), was the symposium organized by the Latin American Network of Assisted Reproduction (REDLARA, for its Spanish acronym) and the Medical Law Association of Costa Rica in 2011. Prof. Ian Cooke, Sheryl Vanderpoel, Vera Raposo, Klaus Wiemer, María Do Carmo Borges de Souza (REDLARA) and María Teresa Urbina (REDLARA) contributed scientific evidence based arguments (2). In addition, the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly invited Urbina to give a conference on the topic of “The IVF and the right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”.

It took more than ten years for the CIDH to initiate court proceedings against the State of Costa Rica. In September 2012, the hearing was finally held, ironically where the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Corte-IDH, for its Spanish acronym) itself sits.

Costa Rica may be the country where the issue of IVF has been most discussed from a medical, ethical, religious and human rights points of view. Fernando Zegers (REDLARA) played a significant role as a scientific expert at the public hearing. The case attracted widespread international attention, 46 amicus curie (friend of the court) briefs were received, including Ian Cooke, Santiago Munné and numerous REDLARA briefs. (2)

THE INTER-AMERICAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS DECISION - Finally, in November 2012, the Corte-IDH issued its sentence on Costa Rica’s constitutional prohibition of in vitro fertilization (IVF) (Artauí Murillo et al, 2012), and addressed alleged human rights violations resulting from the prohibitory ruling of the Constitutional Chamber of the Costa Rican Supreme Court of Justice in 2000 (Judgment No. 2000-02306). The Corte-IDH stated that Costa Rica had infringed the rights to privacy, family life and non-discrimination, articles 11,17, and 24 of the American Convention on Human Rights (3).

THE LEGISLATIVE PROJECTS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE - The long walk continued, “four years after Corte-IDH ordered Costa Rica to lift the ban, the country’s legislature and courts were still successfully stalling” (1). Several law projects about ART were presented in the Legislative Assembly, but none was approved. Gabriel Macaya Trejos, director of the Costa Rican National Academy of Sciences in San Pedro, affirms that most scientists are in favour for IVF, “but those opposing are more vocal, and mask religious convictions with pseudo-scientific arguments.” Something similar happens with lawmakers. Presumably, they mask religious convictions with human rights activism. Lack of a quorum and other tricks were used by IVF opponents to delay the approval of an ordinance to regulate IVF. “The Costa Rican system has proved incapable of reaching consensus on health-related issues,” says Macaya (1). For that reason, President Luis Guillermo Solís signed a decree to legalize IVF, but the constitutional court annulled it, arguing that IVF should be regulated by law and not by presidential decree.

In October 2015, the victims again went before the Corte-IDH, denouncing the stalling and noncompliance of the ruling by the State of Costa Rica. Then in February 2016, the Corte-IDH released a scathing ruling dictating that the current government’s Executive Decree permitting IVF was sufficient for the practice of IVF in the country. The Caja Costarricense, the national health system, is in the process of initiating actions to offer fertility services. Gerardo Escalante and Delia Ribas of the ICI are ready to start finally running their IVF lab next.
May. On April 1st, an IVF ordinance was already signed by the President and the Health Ministry and National Guidelines for IVF practice will soon follow (4).

THE NEW BARRIER - It appeared that infertile couples would not have more obstacles, but opponents of IVF now mask their religious convictions with labor arguments. For example, they are arguing over what type of professional background an embryologist should have. While in the rest of the world, an embryologist could be a biologist like Sir Robert Edwards, 2010 Medicine Nobel Prize winner, who successfully developed IVF. In the rest of the world, a physician or a veterinarian could also work as an embryologist; opponents have set this new obstacle to limit the field. For unclear reasons, they believe that embryology work could only be done by microbiologists. The infertile couples who sued the Costa Rican government can no longer wait, as fertility declines while women age, their fertility is vanishing. Despite many recent advances, it looks that the long walk to IVF freedom in Costa Rica is not over yet.

References:

Workshops

The 5th IFFS Joint International Symposium on Reproductive Endocrinology and Genetics in Beijing

Zi-Jiang Chen | Assistant Secretary General, International Federation of Fertility Societies

The 5th IFFS Joint International Symposium on Reproductive Endocrinology and Genetics was held in Beijing, China on March 6, 2016. It was co-organized by the IFFS, Peking University and Shandong University in conjunction with the IFFS Graduate Student Salon.

This symposium brought together clinicians, embryologists, laboratory technicians, postgraduate students and other health care professionals in the field of reproductive medicine. About 700 delegates participated in the Symposium and the Salon.

Dr. Joe Leigh Simpson, IFFS President, opened the Symposium with a speech on “IFFS International Symposium on Reproductive Endocrinology and Genetics”. Dr. Huai-liang Feng, Professor of the Cornell University, presented a lecture on “The genetic and epigenetic research of ART—from clinical to laboratory”. Renowned international and local speakers covered their topics from the importance of cell biology for fertility, fertility treatment for women with endometriosis, to fertility preservation.

Dr. Simpson chaired the IFFS Graduate Student Salon, which served as a significant platform for the graduate students to exchange research and experience and as a good opportunity for them to obtain the suggestions and guidance from the international and local faculty. Finally, Dr. Simpson commended those students who received an Excellent Paper Award.

The symposium was highly praised by the attendees on its quality and organization.
Workshop
Awareness of Infertility in Myanmar

Tina Buchholz | Scientific Director, International Federation of Fertility Societies

In February, 2016, the Gynaecological and Obstetrics Society (following their 50th anniversary celebration the day before) as a branch of the Myanmar Medical Association in Yangon hosted an IFFS workshop on Awareness of Infertility.

More than 150 gynaecologist, endocrinologist and reproductive specialists, medical practitioners and laboratory experts followed the wide scope of the program. Inaugurated by the Deputy Minister of Health, Professor Thein Thein Htay, who demanded more clinical applications and scientific research in the field of infertility and supported the initiative of international collaboration in her opening speech.

Local organisations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported by WHO expertise gave a clear picture on the country’s current situation and awareness. National and international speakers outlined the basic clinical and laboratory standards and developments. The scope of the national scientific achievements during difficult times emphasised their interest of collaboration for further research development in the county. The enthusiasm was felt and picked up by interactive presentations with practical case discussions for advanced clinical diagnostics and treatment. State of the art and future perspectives, particularly in the field of genetics, but also in high quality laboratory standards were clearly demonstrated.

All participants and lecturers had flourishing communication with the hosting society members during the two day workshop. Discussions of country specific topics for infertility continued outside of the program during lunch, refreshment breaks and dinner.

In the dawn of the opening their first government set up IVF clinic, many questions were raised and could be solved. The Myanmar Gynaecological and Obstetrics Society is now preparing the application to become a member of the IFFS to intensify this collaboration.

22nd World Congress on Infertility
Delhi/India 2016

Tina Buchholz | Scientific Director, International Federation of Fertility Societies

In September of 2016, the world will meet in India to discuss current topics on infertility. The Indian Fertility Society (IFS) and the Indian Society for Assisted Reproduction (ISAR) are hosting the IFFS for our 22nd Triennial World Congress on Infertility.

The three-day congress will be preceded by two days of precongress courses. The successful IFFS strategy of having trilogies for a relevant topic will again lead the structure of the congress. Topics such as Reproductive Endocrine Disorders, Preimplantation Diagnosis, Fertility Preservation and many more will be presented for their basic, clinical and scientific aspects.

Keynote lectures will highlight recent scientific advances in Stem Cell Research, Diagnostic advances through genomics and Mitochondria Transfer. The precongress courses, including full day laboratory training and live surgery were put together by our Indian colleagues.

Scientific sessions and sponsored symposia will add further value to the outstanding invited speakers. We are inviting you to come to Delhi and, most importantly, to actively participate by submitting abstracts until the 15th of June, 2016. Late breaking abstracts will be considered after that date. Concurrent Free Communication sessions are included as well as several regional meetings for discussing local issues within smaller audiences.

We are looking forward to discussing fertility and infertility of all different aspects with you and colleagues from our more than sixty member societies, at Delhi in September.

Please follow the up to date additions of the program on our website: www.iffs2016.com
Global Reproductive Health will be an international open access, multidisciplinary journal published on behalf of the International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS). Its aims are to further knowledge, foster innovation, support research and promote good clinical practice in the field of reproductive medicine within a global setting.

Beginning September 2016, contributions are welcome from healthcare professionals and researchers in the following areas:

- Fertility control
- Periconceptual health
- Sexual health
- Reproductive genetics
- Early pregnancy loss
- Gynecological practice related to reproductive health
- Reproductive surgery
- Imaging
- Epidemiology of reproduction
- Service delivery
- Science and practice of assisted reproduction
- Quality and safety systems
- Health economics
- Male and female infertility
- Early and recurrent pregnancy loss
- Contraception
- Endometriosis
- Menopause
- Polycystic ovary disease

International Calendar

- 22nd IFFS World Congress
  21-25 September 2016
  New Delhi
  www.iffs2016.com

- ASRM 2016 Annual Meeting
  15-19 October 2016
  Salt Lake City, UT, USA
  www.asrmcongress.org

- IFFS/RAHR International Symposium
  6-9 September 2017
  St. Petersburg, Russia
  www.iffs-reproduction.org

- ESHRE 2017 Annual Meeting
  2-5 July 2017
  Geneva, Switzerland
  www.eshre.eu
Welcome to the land of rich heritage...

22nd IFFS World Congress
21-25 September 2016 | New Delhi

Hosted by:
Indian Fertility Society &
Indian Society for Assisted Reproduction

www.iffs2016.com

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