

REPORT OF THE 2018 BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARCÉ SOCIETY FOR PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH

Since its establishment in 1980 the International Marcé Society for Perinatal Mental Health had held its biennial conferences in high-income countries, including England, America, France and Australia. Evidence has accrued since that time however, that there is an unequal distribution in prevalence of perinatal mental health problems. They are much more common among women living in low- and middle-income than in high-income countries. When I stood for election as President in 2014, I argued that we needed to hold the conference in a lower-middle income country, and I was incredibly fortunate that our colleague and friend, perinatal psychiatrist Professor Prabha Chandra agreed, that if I were elected, we could co-convene the conference in India.



The 2018 Conference, Global Experiences, Global Dialogues, Global Responses was held at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru India September 26th – 28th 2018. We are extraordinarily fortunate that the conference could be held in the NIMHANS Convention Centre which had excellent facilities for large and small group presentations, poster display spaces, sponsor booths and for registrants to meet over meals and tea breaks. We are especially grateful for the staffing support and resources that NIMHANS assigned to preparing the Centre for the conference.



In our planning, Prabha and I wanted the conference to be inclusive, accessible to people living and working in LMICs, and to provide specific opportunities for early career professionals to be mentored and to participate.



Registration rates were set on the basis of World Bank Group country classifications, with lower rates for people from less well-resourced nations and for students. We pioneered a scheme whereby people registering for the conference could elect to make a donation to support early career professionals from LMICs to participate. We received generous sponsorship from the T.S. Srinivasan Foundation, which, with the donations enabled us to support 11 early career professionals from 9 countries to participate.

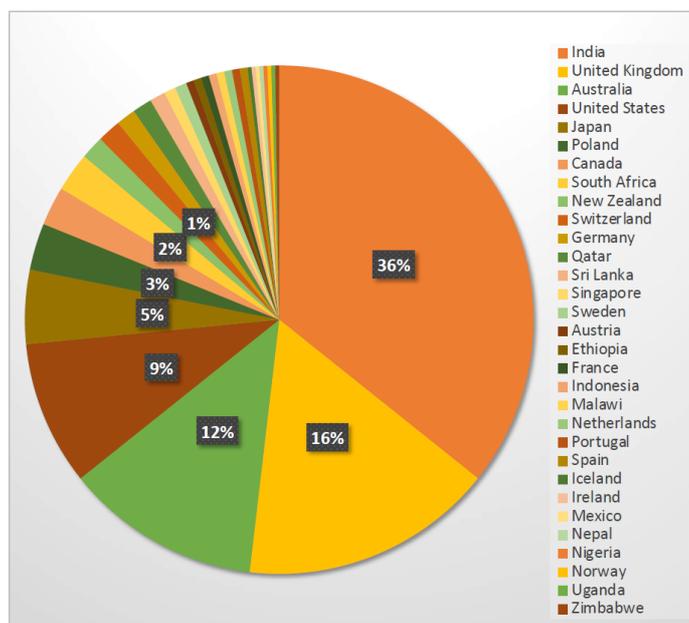
The Young Professionals Program was organised by Dr Gayatri Saraf, Dr Soumya Parameshwaran, Dr Madhuri, Ms. Supraja and Mr. Matthew Bluett-Duncan. It included mentorship breakfasts in which small groups of early career professionals had breakfast with an international leader to discuss their aspirations and plans and to hear about projects and opportunities in other countries.



In partnership with the International Association for Women's Mental Health a preconference workshop about Women and Leadership enabled 30 women early in their careers to learn strategies for taking authority and accepting positions of responsibility. The Young Professionals Program included a social program and visits to Bengaluru sites to enable them to build collegial friendships.



In total, more than 620 people from 31 countries in 5 continents registered for and contributed to the conference. We had 224 oral and 180 poster presentations in a program expertly arranged by Dr Geetha Desai with the local and international Scientific Committees.



The formal opening ceremony, inauguration and closing ceremonies demonstrated the support of the NIMHANS executive and faculty members and Indian and international expert professional groups. Sister societies the Indian Psychiatric Society, represented by Dr. Ajit Bhide, the Bangalore Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology by Dr. Shobha Gudi, International Association for Women's Mental Health, represented by President Professor Jayashri Kulkarni, the International Society for Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynaecology represented by President Professor Sibil Tschudin, the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists represented by President-elect Dr Vijay Roach spoke about the close synergies between their organisations and the Marcé Society. President of the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India Dr Jaideep Malhotra travelled from New Delhi to speak at the Inauguration emphasising the value to India of having an influential expert international professional society holding a major conference in the nation.



Our invited speakers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds gave extraordinary lectures: Lakshmi Vijaykumar about suicide among women; Evita Fernandez, the ethics of childbirth, Sherryl Goodman about why postpartum depression requires prioritisation, and Carmine Pariante on the most recent evidence about how mental health problems influence fetal development. The Channi Kumar lecture was given by Atif Rahman who argued persuasively that notions that mental health problems among women living in LMICs are not detectable or treatable are myths. His Thinking Healthy Program has been implemented effectively by trained supervised community health workers in many countries. Bryanne Barnett, winner of the John Cox Medal reminded us that pregnancy and childbirth can be traumatising. Cindy-Lee Dennis the winner of the Marcé Medal argued that cross-national public health approaches can prevent developmental risks to adult disease.



We invited experts from South Asia and high-income countries to co-convene symposia which drew together speakers from several nations. Topics were diverse and included: assessing and addressing perinatal experiences of interpersonal violence; trauma and childbearing; obstetrics and gynaecology and perinatal mental health; the biology of severe perinatal psychiatric disorders; pharmacological treatments for severe mental illness during pregnancy and lactation and universal community-based strategies for prevention. All attracted large audiences and stimulated discussion among participants.

The World Health Organization and UNICEF's Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development was launched at the World Health Assembly in Geneva in May 2018 (www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/nurturing-care-early-childhood-development/en/). The Framework is explicit in including the mental health of women who are pregnant or who are mothers as a key to the health, growth and development of very young children. We were honoured to be permitted to launch the Framework for the Society and for delegates drawn from member states from each continent.





Professors Tom O'Connor and Kieran O'Donnell arranged a wonderful Festschrift in honour of Professor Vivette Glover who in addition to her major and influential contributions to knowledge about maternal mental health and fetal growth and development, has supported and served the Society since its earliest years. Video greetings from colleagues all over the world attested to her generosity as a mentor and supervisor.

St John of God Health Care, a not-for-profit private health care organisation, which runs perinatal mental health services including through its community outreach programs and the Gidget Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation which raises awareness about perinatal depression and anxiety and provides services, including telemedicine support sponsored a dinner for all delegates after the conference inauguration.



The wonderful conference banquet for all delegates, with lively Bollywood dancing led by the NIMHANS staff and entertainment from stand-up comedian and ENT surgeon Daddy Do-Little (Dr. Jagdish Chaturvedi).





The White Swan Foundation for Mental Health is a not-for-profit organization based in Bengaluru that translates research evidence for people living with mental health problems and their families to assist decision-making, adjustment and recovery. It instituted the White Swan Foundation Prize for Perinatal Mental Health Education for the Conference. It was to recognize influential work by institutions that 'catalyze perinatal mental health awareness through stakeholder education', with a particular focus on models that had potential to be taken to scale in LMICs. In a very competitive process, the first prize was awarded to the Institute of Health Visiting, London, U.K. and the Second Prize the European Institute of Perinatal Mental Health, Madrid, Spain.





Poster prizes were made available through a generous donation from Dr. Shabbir Amanullah, a Canadian psychiatrist and an alumnus of NIMHANS and were awarded on the basis of reviews by senior academics to the five most scientifically rigorous posters presented each day.

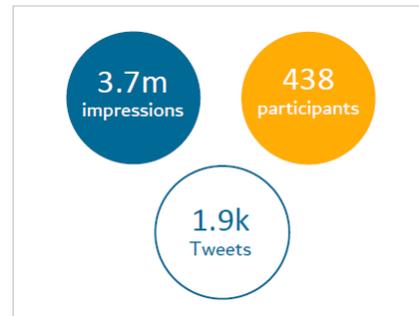


We are very grateful Sage Therapeutics, Icons Life Sciences, Intas, and Sun whose support contributed to the scientific and social programs, the audio-visual technical resources and the conference app.

In addition to the conference program, delegates were given the extraordinary opportunity of visits to NIMHANS, which included the yoga treatment and research

facilities, the mother baby unit for treatment of women with severe postnatal mental health problems and a community clinic in a rural village.

For the first time, the Conference appointed a professional social media strategist. Ms Rita Stockhowe's work in promoting the Conference, in particular on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram was a major advance. The #marce2018 hashtag was registered on Symplur, a free open platform Healthcare Hashtag Project, which aims to bring together consumers, healthcare providers and advocates. Symplur allowed us to track the performance of the conference hashtag, as well as the secondary hashtag #globalPMH. Overall, 400 Twitter accounts used the #marce2018 hashtag, which reached 3.7million accounts during the conference.



One of the very successfully tagged posts on Twitter was the announcement of Roxanne Keynejad's presentation of her systematic review and meta-analysis of Intimate Partner Violence and Women's Mental Health in LMICs, which reached over 3,500 Twitter accounts.

Many delegates told us how much they had appreciated the cultural, spiritual and symbolic elements of the conference: the poetry from India, Australia, France and South Africa that was read at the beginning of each day, watering the Tulsi plant in the opening ceremony and the floating of candles on the lotus pond at the closing ceremony, and the beautiful fresh flower mandala which welcomed us in the entrance hall. Especially appreciated was the specifically choreographed Bharathnatyam classical Indian dance Karuluballi – The Umbilical Cord performed by psychiatrist sisters Pavithra and Shubratha and Dr. Pavithra's daughter Bhumi.



There was widespread acclamation about the quality of science, exceptional opportunity for mutual learning and the power of the explicitly inclusive program. Participants described the conference as ‘transformative’, and ‘pivotal’ in its goal of bringing people from the Global North and the Global South together for effective Global Dialogues.

We are grateful to the many people who contributed to the extraordinary success of the conference, but especially the committed and wholehearted collaboration with NIMHANS including their administrative and leadership team, which made it possible.



Jane Fisher and Prabha Chandra

Co-convenors of the Biennial Congress of the International Marcé Society for Perinatal Mental Health 2018

