

FIGO Congress News: FIGO Launches World Report On Women's Health 2009

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'Reproductive And Sexual Health Rights: 15 Years After ICPD'

'Fifteen years after the groundbreaking 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the FIGO World Report on Women's Health 2009 takes stock of progress made and vital work still to be tackled,' said Professor Gamal Serour, President-Elect of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), at the launch of the World Report on Women's Health 2009 at FIGO's World Congress in Cape Town (4-9 October 2009).

He continued: 'This comprehensive report provides a critical overview on the theme: "Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights: 15 years after ICPD". It details not only the progress that we have made in reproductive and sexual health rights but also focuses, as did our very first report, on the significant and numerous challenges that lie ahead - for example, it is a shocking and sobering fact that global maternal mortality figures, at over 500,000 a year, have not changed since 1990, and morbidity is about 20million.

'The articles in this concise, wide-ranging report aim to meet the objectives of FIGO as they reflect on the realities that affect women's health in most parts of the world, and the urgent need for advocacy, expertise and collaboration to promote health, well-being and the status of women through the obstetrical/gynecological community, using available evidence.'

WORLD REPORT ON WOMEN'S HEALTH 2009 – KEY TOPIC FINDINGS INCLUDE:

Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights

- ICPD goals and health-related MDGs are essential for development and are within reach. Success is possible if there is commitment among partners, and obstetricians and gynecologists have an important role to play.
- 15 years after ICPD, some conservative, religious, and political forces continue to resist the implementation of several means of protecting and advancing reproductive and sexual health rights.

Safe Motherhood and Newborn Health

- In Western countries, obstetric pathologies are increasingly related to lifestyle, diet, environment and aging. In other countries, infectious diseases are the leading cause of mortality and morbidity.
- Access to emergency obstetric care is vital to reduce maternal mortality. Quality facility-based essential and emergency obstetric care is the best option. To address inequities, governments need to invest in the right strategies.

- Medicalisation of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) by healthcare professionals must be outlawed if its elimination within a generation is to be achieved.

Sexual Health

- Young people have significant unmet needs for sexual and reproductive health education, information and services. Ignoring these needs has fatal consequences and violates their rights.
- The HIV pandemic disproportionately affects women and children in under-resourced countries, who therefore suffer the burden of this devastating condition and are affected by stigmatization, barriers to treatment, and barriers to prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.
- Violence against women is a worldwide health and human rights problem that needs to be addressed urgently for women to be able to reach their health and full potential.
- Collaboration with faith-based organizations (FBO) is vital to overcome resistance to the implementation of means of protecting and advancing reproductive and sexual health rights, and accelerating the achievement of health-related MDGs.

Fertility Regulation

- The family planning movement deserves continued support to address unmet contraceptive needs, especially among deprived groups, through good governance of sound policies, with multisectoral initiatives and a rights-based approach.
- Although unsafe abortion contributes to 13 percent of maternal deaths, the human drama and health consequences of abortion are mostly ignored because of political and religious implications. Means to solve these issues are known; however, political will is still lacking.

Issues in Women's Healthcare

- The 'brain drain' further weakens already fragile reproductive and sexual health services in low-income countries, and seriously impedes achieving the health-related MDGs. International initiatives to manage the pressures on the health workforce should be supported.

- The health of women is greatly affected by migration. Women's health advocates should persist in raising the issues of health and human rights of female migrants.
- Parliamentarians are central to the full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. They must act as spokespersons for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights. ICPD + 15 is an opportune year to galvanise support for the new MDG 5 target.

Professor Serour added: 'The report reiterates that reproductive and sexual health services are a human right of women around the world and underlines that the poorest and under-served women in low- and middle-income countries have least access to the necessary or basic information and services. Although progress has been made in achieving reproductive and sexual health rights in many countries, many agenda items from the ICPD Programme of Action remain unfinished, and it is critical that they now be addressed.'

He ended: 'The World Report 2009 represents the continuing commitment of FIGO to advance not only women's health but also - equally importantly - their human rights.'