



Australian Society for  
Psychosocial Obstetrics  
& Gynaecology

## NEWSLETTER

February 2016

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Following the highly successful 41st Annual Scientific Meeting in Melbourne on 31st July and the 1st August, ASPOG then followed up on the international stage, with involvement in both the ISPOG symposium, and as an invited presenter on palliative care, at the FIGO conference in Vancouver in October.

The core principles of psychosocial medicine, are finally becoming more mainstream, and are reflected in the follow up to the 2015 Millennium Goals. It is therefore vitally important that we continue to encourage the awareness and practice of this type of holistic care. There was much discussion about teaching this approach in medical schools.

This year in May we have just been told that 3 Australian seminars have been accepted at the ISPOG meeting in Malaga, a great achievement, and a lovely city in which to hear a varied scientific programme, and to visit Picasso's birthplace.

At home we are trying to increase our links with our New Zealand colleagues, in order, to form a combined society. Jackie Stacy attended the NZ Regional RANZCOG meeting in Wellington in October where she was handed the microphone by the Chair of one of the sessions so enabling her to advertise our existence and our wish for New Zealand interest.

The next 'home' Annual Scientific meeting is in Hobart at the end of July 2016.

If you are interested in attending any of these meetings please check out the website.

[www.aspog.org.au](http://www.aspog.org.au)

I would also like to announce the winners of the following prizes awarded at our 2015 ASM:

#### New Researcher Prize

– Genevieve Dally, *Family Planning NT*

#### Suzanne Abraham Award

– Laura Deveson, *University of Adelaide*

Further detail of the content of their papers is in this newsletter

Susan Carr

### ASPOG GOES TO THE ISPOG CONFERENCE IN MAY 2016

ISPOG will hold the 18th (triennial) congress in Malaga, Spain on 12-14 May 2016. We are very pleased that members of ASPOG will be attending.

We have submitted proposals for three ASPOG symposia in which 11 members of ASPOG will speak. A/Prof Susan Carr will chair the first entitled: 'Mind, body and women's health'; Dr Tonia Mezzini will chair the second 'Sexual, reproductive and mental health' and Dr Heather Rowe will chair the third 'Sociocultural perspectives on the perinatal period'. The titles encompass a wide range of topics and perspectives. (Talk about putting ASPOG on the global map – Editorial comment – thank you to all those who are participating).

We hope other ASPOG members will join us and present their work at the conference (abstracts close on 1 December) or simply attend and enjoy the historical and cultural delights of seaside Malaga in southern Spain. There are more details available at the congress website [www.ispog2016.es](http://www.ispog2016.es)

Heather Rowe

### REPORT ON 2015 ASPOG SCIENTIFIC MEETING ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL, MELBOURNE. 31/07/2015- 01/08/2015

It was back to Melbourne at the end of July for us all this year to meet at the familiar and welcoming Royal Womens Hospital.. Assoc Prof Susan Carr had organised a diverse and informative group of speakers and we were pleased to note that this year we had the largest number of attendees at any Victorian ASPOG conference, which augurs well for the future of the Society. Friday morning's presentations were especially star-studded, starting with Prof Martha Hickey's overview of the management of the menopause in high-risk women. This was followed by the perennially energetic Prof Lorraine Dennerstein summarizing the findings of her 20-year study of post-menopausal sexual

functioning. She was as always a dynamic and informative presenter. We then heard from Assoc Prof Kate Stern, describing age-related infertility and the widespread but mistaken opinion in the community that the difficulties can invariably be overcome by assisted reproduction techniques. Anaesthetist Dr Andrew Buettner then gave an action-packed presentation on analgesia in labour and the unpredictability of analgesic requirements according to various descriptors of labouring women. (I am reminded of my engineer husband who opines that "if men had to have babies there would be none of this 'natural childbirth' rubbish!").

After a delicious morning tea (we are reliably beautifully well-nourished at the Women's) we were given updates on the current state of HPV vaccine uptake and effects in Victoria by Prof Suzanne Garland and cervical screening also in Victoria by Dr David Wrede. The morning was concluded by a somewhat different approach to pelvic pain by Dr Tonia Mezzini of SHineSA, who likened the precipitant of some experiences of pain to a snake-bite - which can be an almost undiscernible event followed by substantial consequences. Tonia also canvassed the concept of "vulval memory" causing heightened reaction to new stimuli after previous trauma.

Two fascinating sessions of free communications in the afternoon included an account of the prevalence and effects of sexual trafficking of adolescent girls in Nepal – it is horrifying to acknowledge the enormity and scale of such heinous practices. Then our own Dr Maggie Kirkman from Jean Hailes Womens Research Unit presented the findings of her study of abortion experiences of young women with breast cancer – what frightening choices are raised by a diagnosis of breast cancer in pregnancy! Then, completing a line-up of familiar ASPOG faces, Karin Hammarberg, also of Jean Hailes, elaborated further on women's psychological needs when breast cancer coincides with pregnancy, and how best to address these concerns.

We then were treated to two inspiring presentations of their research projects by medical students Shona Schadel from Sydney University, who reported on prenatal psychosocial risk evaluation in a private hospital setting, and Laura Deveson from Adelaide University who described an interesting case study of PCOS and pregnancy. I spoke with both girls afterwards and am happy to report that according to this sample, women and their care will be in good hands in the future! I understand that the concurrent free communications session was equally stimulating and well-received.

Friday afternoon concluded with a fascinating group of reflections on ethics: first, an impassioned discussion of cancer care as a human right from Prof Michael Quinn of Melbourne University and then a highly informed presentation regarding the ethics of sexual healthcare delivery by Prof Christine Tippet of Monash University. The last speaker of the day was Dr Jan Hodgson of Melbourne University who spoke thoughtfully and compassionately about supporting couples after a prenatal diagnosis of a fetal abnormality, particularly through decisions regarding termination of pregnancy.

We then held the ASPOG AGM, which encouragingly included the election of three new members to the Committee. We warmly welcome them to help us manage our illustrious Society!

In the evening many of us attended dinner at The Carlton Wine rooms, notable for its lovely atmosphere and scrumptious herb bread! The evening was equally satisfying to the mind as well as the body, with our past president Heather Rowe giving us a comprehensive and erudite oration about Derek Llewellyn-Jones, the founder of ASPOG, and the Society's history through the years. Heather has the honour (and doubtless much hard work!) of being the current Secretary General of the International Society for Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynaecology, its next Congress being in May 2016, in Malaga, Spain.

Saturday's presentations continued the high standards set on the first day, beginning with the RWH's Prof Louise Newman addressing mother child attachment, with the many variations of normal and abnormal bonds, the significance of the "ghosts in the nursery" and the impact on child development. This was followed by a review of the PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia) helpline by Prof Della Forster, also of the Women's Hospital; it provides a vital service as well as having a cute name! Assoc. Prof Ruth McNair of Melbourne University

then gave a thoughtful address about the effects on children of same-sex relationship parenting – particularly topical in light of the current debate on possible legalisation of same-sex marriages in Australia. Research concludes that "outcomes for the children appear to be overwhelmingly positive", which bears out our clinical experiences.

Morning tea was followed by three presentations about sexual problems, starting with "When Love Hurts" by Dr Wendy Vanselow of RWH, which addressed the importance of thorough history and examination practice and empowerment of the patient (and partner). Dr Anita Elias of Monash then followed, on vaginismus, its causes and cultural context, and physiotherapist Shan Morrison gave a welcome paramedical slant to this topic, discussing the prevalence of sexual pain problems in our community and their impact. She canvassed some of the contributors to sexual difficulties including the role of the pelvic floor and its physiotherapeutic management.

We then devoured lunch with our usual vigour! The afternoon began with a forum about young people and sexuality, starting with Wendy Heywood of La Trobe University summarising the findings of the Fifth National Survey of Secondary School Students (years 10-12) and Sexual Health in 2013. This presentation was very informative, and gave a hopeful portrait of adolescents' knowledge, sex education and sexual practices. Dr Megan Lim of the Burnet Institute then spoke about sexual subtexts of modern society, including the influence of new technologies, music festivals and popular fiction. Dr William Leonard of La Trobe concluded this session, addressing the needs of same sex attracted and gender diverse youth. This again is very relevant to today's more open and hopefully more inclusive gender diverse world.

We then enjoyed afternoon tea, and the last of the free communications, again with two concurrent sessions, each with five varied and interesting topics presented. Prizes were awarded and drinks were taken in the convivial atmosphere of Saturday afternoon.

We are very grateful to Susan and her capable organizing committee for a wide-ranging and fascinating congress, and look forward to next year's meeting to be held in Hobart, which is likely to be colder in midwinter even than Melbourne! But we know from long practice that it will certainly be warm in welcome and attitude! See you there!

**Jenny Thomas**

## **"I'm here for my Women's check up"- HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CERVICAL SCREENING**

*Presented by Genevieve Dally - Winner of  
the New Researcher Prize ASPOG ASM 2015*

### **The main points are:**

- Well Women's health checks (or Pap test consultation) provide practitioners working in the remote setting with many opportunities to address women's health issues such as contraception, STI screening, breast health and lifestyle factors.
- The proposed change to the national cervical screening program (Renewal) is going to have a big impact on how often these issues are managed in the clinical setting
- A clinic audit from a urban sexual health service was undertaken to better understand the potential impact
- Of the total client visits in June and November 2014 (104), 236 issues were managed, in addition to cervical screening. On only seven occasions in June and two occasions in November was the Pap test the only service provided to the client
- In June 2014 (70) and November 2014 (34) respectively, the most common additional service undertaken by the clients attending primarily for cervical screening was breast health (15.5%, 23.5%), STI screening (57.8%, 47.1%) and contraception discussion (57.8%, 61.8%)
- MSAC estimates a ~46% reduction in cervical screening annually
- This has big implications for practice

### **Recommendations include:**

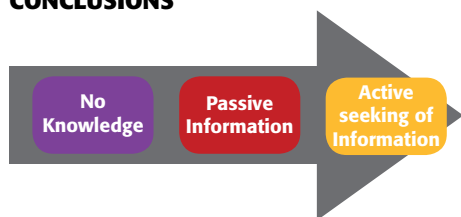
- Proactive, targeted women's health promotion campaigns
- MBS item number for 'sexual and reproductive health review'
- MBS item number for STI screening
- Thorough evaluation of the impact of the Renewal changes

## POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME AND PREGNANCY-THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

*Presented by Laura Deveson - Winner of the Suzanne Abraham Award ASPOG ASM 2015*

The main points highlight the barriers that women face in accessing reliable health information and the role that television programs have in providing health information. The case that I presented demonstrates how health-related television programs bridge a gap and prompt women to actively seek health information from reliable sources.

### CONCLUSIONS



### WE MADE IT!

ASPOG was mentioned on Page 11 of the Sydney Morning Herald, Sunday August 9th. The article was titled "Forty & Fab: older women fare well in pregnancy" The article was centred around the paper presented at the Melbourne meeting by Kate Stern: Mothers or Grandmothers-Assisted Contraception in older women. I trust Kate was happy with the gist of the article.

## WHAT IS THE THERAWAND?

As you are aware I am passionate about education and sharing resources for the benefit of us all and our patients so when I came across the Therawand I approached Shan Morrison, director of Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy in Melbourne to see if she had heard of it: "Yes we are aware of the Therawand and stock them and the girls have been using them – in some patients (male and female) to good effect for their myofascial release work". Up until now to assist pelvic pain patients with release of their painful trigger points in the pelvic floor-homework was suggested using a vaginal dilator (apologies they now have a different name...Senior Moment..) but as you can see from the website these have a much improved shape so aiding in their usage.

[www.therawand.com](http://www.therawand.com)

Unfortunately, like a lot of interesting devices there is no clear scientific evidence to be able to recommend them as a professional society. ....so more research on this and other similar products would always be welcome!

Jackie Stacy

## FRIENDS OF SCIENCE IN MEDICINE

I was asked to address the University of Adelaide medical graduates in December 2015 and confer their degrees. The essence of the address I gave was that scientific evidence based medical doctors will soon be greatly outnumbered by "Doctors" of Naturopathy, Iridology, Reflexology, Chiropractic, Osteopathy etc as a large number of dubious colleges and lesser universities are graduating thousands in various types of Woo.

The general public is mostly not scientifically literate, untrained in critical thinking and vulnerable to the marketing of unsubstantiated health benefits. Sadly the federal government does little to effectively police false therapies and false claims.

Friends of Science in Medicine (now over 1,200 supporters) would welcome more supporters from ASPOG. No subscription. Visit the web site.

[www.scienceinmedicine.org.au](http://www.scienceinmedicine.org.au)

Alistair MacLennan  
Vice President of Friends  
of Science in Medicine





**aspog**

42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting

Hotel Grand Chancellor  
Hobart, Tasmania

Thursday 28 July - **2016**  
Saturday 30 July

# No woman is an island

How  
Life,  
Lifestyle and  
Relationships  
Affect Women's  
Health...

[www.aspog.org.au](http://www.aspog.org.au)



Australian Society for  
Psychosocial Obstetrics  
& Gynaecology