



ISPOG 18th International Congress - Building Bridges to Better Care - a Personal Reflection

I had no doubt about whether I would sign up or not for the 18th ISPOG Congress in Málaga, having thoroughly enjoyed the 16th and 17th ISPOG Congresses in Venice and Berlin respectively. I did not want to miss out on this one in "sunny" Spain. My expectations (other than for brilliant and un-relenting sunshine) were all fulfilled. Perhaps the rain was just as well, as the hotel I chose and the auditorium were opposite the beach, and I might have missed some of the educational aspects in pursuit of sun, but I was pleased to catch a few great rainbow pictures! Malaga as a city has so much more to offer than just sunshine, and you could spend days there learning about the history of the city and visiting all the art museums. The conference venue was the beautiful Centro Civico, apparently a paediatric sanatorium in a past life.

I have been a member BSPOGA since 2010 (Secretary from 2010-2015), and aware of the strong need to foster links with international societies and meet other colleagues who share similar aims – to improve awareness, recognition and healthcare for women during their reproductive lives.

I was privileged to join the pre and post ISPOG ExCo meetings and the General Assembly which helped me learn more about the society, collaboration with other organisations including FIGO , EBCOG and NASPOG, and to welcome new members from exciting places such as Brazil, Turkey, Slovenia, Russia and Dubai, not to mention ISPOG's ambassadorial activities in recruiting new member "states"!

ISPOG has always attracted me, understanding a different model of care in Europe, with strong input from psychiatry and psychology, which are often integrated into Obstetric and Gynaecology practices - many clinicians being dual trained. I would dearly like to see us building more bridges towards greater integration between psyche and soma and invite more body workers (not just physiotherapists) who have a good understanding of the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of women's reproductive health.

So what did I choose to attend?

In the pre-congress Train the Trainer - dealing with the difficult patient workshop, it was great to meet like-minded multi-professional colleagues from Australia, Austria , Norway Russia , Slovenia , Spain , NL , Switzerland, and I thoroughly enjoyed the interaction between us. We look forward to receiving the presentations by email to help us prepare our own workshops. Participants all received a pocket card with handy acronyms - which you will learn if you attend the Joint BSPOG/RCOG workshop on 31 March 2017!

I then heard Croatia present on fetal programming and epigenetics and, being patriotic, attended the British (BSPOGA) symposium - interventions to promote perinatal wellbeing. The lecture on Personal Academies with Harry van der Weil was for me the most motivational. His vision is for a massive open online course / ISPOG wiki, incorporating elements of know how (competency), content and clinical reasoning. "If you can dream it, build it !". The forthcoming Springer textbook on BioPsychosocial Obstetrics and Gynaecology – a Competency Based Approach is a good example of what can be achieved.

A keynote lecture then followed entitled "Psychological and biological response to traumatic stress in women". My main memory of this was the picture of the presenter - Miranda Olf (NL) parachuting - with the caption "I happen to like stress", highlighting that the physiology of stress can build resilience! Then the Australia POG society symposium on pelvic pain- beyond infection, the symposium on expectations and birth, and our colleagues from Austria on influences on CS decision making. I would then have liked to go to cancer survivorship (NL) but was drawn to other go to the other NL symposium on trauma, helping us understand how we can prevent traumatic delivery experiences. It is "not necessarily the intervention but the way it was handled". This was then followed by the innovative and much needed Mind to Care web-based intervention developed by ISPOG Past President Marieke Paarlberg and colleagues on screening for vulnerabilities in the Netherlands.

The Friday started at 0830 with the Netherlands again, this time on vaginal penetration disorders and the pelvic floor, covering sexual pain disorders and the efficacy of therapist aided exposure for reduction in fear and avoidance of coitus, something I was required to attend after stating my wish for more integration with our somatic therapists! Needless to say it was excellent and thought provoking.

Presentations recognised the importance of fathers and the need to engage partners in childbirth, and post-traumatic stress among fathers following childbirth. Unfortunately I was so engaged in these topics that I then missed most of Denise Defey (Uruguay) - always a passionate and engaging speaker.

I went to my second workshop of the Congress - Tools for wellbeing and prevention of burnout and stress in birth attendants. This was absolutely excellent with thoughtful reflection and discussion, the archetypal divisions between obstetrician and midwife, and the importance of the culture of the workplace in an organisation that responds to stress. It is important that we focus on positive aspects of the care we provide – saving women's lives.

Topics throughout the day included PMS, termination of pregnancy, the Spanish symposia, psycho-oncology, and a joint Sweden / USA symposium on the identification and therapeutic management of traumatic relations among vulnerable patients – the Tiger in the Room! And yes, I managed to catch some of the oral communications, and see the last of the posters on the Saturday before the EBCOG – ISPOG joint symposium too!

With such a great program, I have not yet mentioned the social events – which included a great pre-congress dinner in the Restaurant José Carlos García – most definitely the first time I have seen a garden growing on the walls! I enjoyed the Flamenco dancing in the opening ceremony, and the congress dinner outing to the beach (thankfully in an inside restaurant as the weather was rather forbidding!) was a wonderful, warm and friendly event.

All in all, it was a fantastic Congress. The accommodation and transport links were excellent, although sadly there was little time to spend wandering round Malaga as I had to get back to work, taking time out of course for the RCOG congress in June where BSPOGA hosted a symposium.

ISPOG Seoul 2019, here we come!

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