Let the old live, let the young grow and let the child survive- 14th WCPH ‘s message to the world

Wednesday February 11 saw the scintillating opening ceremony of the 14th World Congress on Public Health at the Grand Theatre, Science City Kolkata, following the events of ISMOPH on 9th and 10th February. The ceremony started with a brief introduction of Kolkata- the host city, acquainting the gathered international audience of its history and culture. A procession of the national flags of all the member countries of the world followed suit on screen.

Immediate past President WFPHA & ICOC Co-Chair WCPH Mr. James Chauvin took stage after Dr. Kumar and opened his speech by taking the audience on a time travel, recalling the first WCPH in West Germany in 1975, which consisted of just a few hundred people. He recounted excerpts from the proceedings of the first Congress and reflected on the current goals of WCPH- achieving the highest levels of health worldwide, while ensuring that everyone gets to enjoy basic human rights irrespective of their gender, race or creed. Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and MD NRHM, Shri C K Mishra then went on to make the plenary address. Mr. Mishra stated that public health remains a key issue globally, while new challenges like climate change, giving rise to new diseases. He advocated the creation of an atmosphere of wellness, and healthcare in place of hospital care. He noted that health professionals won’t be able to make a difference alone as there are several other factors like education and awareness. Following this, he mentioned the two major challenges existing currently: health inequity across the globe and inefficiencies in the ways of delivering health services, with another problem being the fact that Non Communicable Diseases are on the rise and that they cause more than 60% mortality in India. Maternal and child health were also noted as immediate concerns.

The elite panel of delegates consisting of Dr. Madhumita Dobe, Dr. Mengistu Asnake, Dr. J Ravi Kumar, Mr. James Chauvin, Shri C K Mishra, Guest of Honour Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh and Chief Guest H.E Mr. Kamalesh Sharma then went on to light the traditional lamp signifying the ceremonial inauguration. Organizing Secretary Dr. Dobe then went on to welcome her co-panelists and the audience at large. Following her welcome speech, WFPHA President & Scientific Co-Chair Dr. Asnake recalled upon the city of Kolkata being the host of WCPH for the second time, along with its history, recalling the contributions of past stalwarts like Roland Ross and others who worked towards vectorborne diseases. He then talked about the upcoming sustainable development goals in order to achieve the highest standards of health worldwide. He went on to note the already achieved successes, namely the significant reduction in tobacco use, lowered maternal deaths and eradication of vaccine preventable diseases like polio. Dr. Asnake also mentioned WCPH’s solidarity in standing by the victims of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa where over 25,000 people lost their lives including nearly 9000 children. As a concluding note, he stated that he believes public health should not be an agenda of only health professionals, but everybody at large as it is an issue of global concern, especially with increasingly porous borders.

Dr. Vishvas Chaudhry was felicitated with the Dr. Hugh R. Leavell Award during the Opening Ceremony, in recognition of his immense contribution to the eradication of polio in India. He delivered the Hugh Leavell lecture after being presented with the award by the regional director of WHO SEARO, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh.

Lastly, Guest of Honour Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director of WHO SEARO mentioned the key pillars in the field of public health while noting that 21st century public health requires a 21st century approach. She mentioned that the NCDs have been costing the south-east Asian countries in trillions and that the Ebola outbreak is a major wake up call.
Finally, as a conclusion, Chief Guest H.E Mr. Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary General Commonwealth of Nations spoke of the digital context in the field of public health and the very pertinent issue of the convergence of resources in order to achieve maximum efficiency in terms of health services among the commonwealth countries.

Dr. J Ravi Kumar, President & ICOC Co-Chair WCPH conveyed Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s message to the Congress. She regretted her physical absence at the occasion while conveying her full support. She wished the 14th WCPH a grand success.

A lively and colourful dance show was choreographed by Kamalika Banerjee and Sanjeev Bhattacharya keeping in mind the theme of the congress “Healthy people, healthy environment”.

“The postures of dance help in stability, mudras help in concentration and group coordination helps to unite” was the message Kamalika Banerjee conveyed in between the performance.

Inauguration in pictures

Guests and delegates at the exhibition area after the formal photo & poster exhibition of WCPH.
ISMOPH Workshops

Violence against women and doctors
Violence affects the lives of millions of women worldwide, it cuts across cultural and religious barriers, restricting the rights of women to participate in the society. This type of violence take a disturbing variety of forms; from domestic abuse and rape to child marriages and female feticide. The four hour long seminar on the strengthening of role towards a healthy system addressing violence against women aimed at incorporating a gender perspective within the medical institution. When a woman or girl gets raped, from police complaints to the final court verdict, a medical report serves as the litmus test. The upcoming young doctors present in the seminar were urged to look beyond treating a case only symptomatically and emotionally connect with the patient instead, giving in a more in-depth report hence.

A thought provoking question that arose at the seminar was the on the ethical values of medical science. Do doctors only provide the statistical result of a rape case and get done with the job or is there something more to it? Since, more often than not, even thought the result of a test may be negative, it does not necessarily mean that rape has not taken place. Information goes missing if the victim takes a shower or urinates after the incident has taken place, an instinct which is but natural. In 1993, the united national general assembly adopted a declaration, which for the first time offers an official UN definition of gender based abuse.

In India, women fall victim to traditional practices that have to do with gender roles and power relations deep rooted in the society. The patriarchal practices are in built into the system in ways that go unnoticed and yet exist around us. One insensitive way is in which the medical text books constantly objectifying women as "reproductive commodity."

The age old issue of old age
Dr. Shyamal Das of Burdwan Medical College went informed the audience of the high attrition rate among the elderly populace and the increasing trend of stroke and dementia being more and more commonplace everyday. Furthermore, he stated that Indians have started to be afflicted by stroke from a young age nowadays. Hypertension, increasing stress, smoking and alcoholism were identified as the foremost reasons.

Dr. Madhuchanda Kar spoke about geriatric oncology and its associated concerns. She divided the geriatric patients into age groups of 'young old' (65-74), 'medium old' (75-84), and 'oldest old' (85+). Statistical data shows that older adults are the fastest growing age group in the western countries whereas in India the 65+ age group exhibits 60% cancer cases and 71% cancer deaths. Limited oncology evidence base, systematic discrimination on the basis of age both on a personal and clinical level and selective treatment on the part of the doctors were seen as the primary concerns. Dr. Kar went on to stress on the factor of quality of life being more crucial to the geriatric group than mere survival. She also advocated the implementation of CGA (comprehensive geriatric assessment) and the importance of identifying when the risks outweigh the benefits while screening older patients.

As a conclusion to the discussion, Dr. Tapas Das of KPC Medical College presented a few models of geriatric care like home care, sub-acute care, acute hospital care etc. and stressed on the already mentioned issues and their implications on the state of old age and its concerns in our nation.

Congress at a glance
Nearly 2,000 participants from 50 plus countries; the Congress will have plenary and concurrent sessions, oral and poster presentations, workshops and different exhibitions on public health.
- The key themes of the plenary sessions will be in the areas listed below
- Defining the Role of Public Health in Today's Global Setting
- Public Health Approaches to Address New Challenges of Sustainable Development and Healthy Environment
- Global Public Health Challenges
- Human Rights and Law as Tools for Sustainable Development
- Public health services in India – progress and prospects
- Enteric and diarrheal diseases
- Measles elimination
- The story of water sanitation and hygiene (WASH)
- Public health in reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health
- Maternal death surveillance and response
- Health systems development – priorities for public health (India)
- Japanese encephalitis
- Health impacts of energy choices
- Environmental determinants of health

Fun Moments
GuestSpeak

Nunilia Ferreira De Oliveira and Fernando Silva de Oliveira are guests from Brazil who are here in Kolkata to attend the six-day long seminar. They look forward to bridging the communication gap between Brazil and Kolkata. Fun and knowledge go hand in hand as they club this seminar with their long planned trip to the city. On asked what Nunilia is enjoying the most in Kolkata, “the early morning yoga classes” comes the prompt reply along with a bright smile.

Field Visits

Delegates interested in field visits to clinics or urban slums are to contact the Registration. You can book only one trip per day. The timing of the trips are 1 pm to 5 pm on all days.

12th February
- MR Bangur Hospital
- Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

13th February
- Missionaries of Charity
- Health education and condom promotion program targeting sex workers

14th February
- Public Health Clinics of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation
- Institute of Post Graduate Medical Education & Research (IPGMER)
- National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED)

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