

## **COINN Newsletter – October 2007**

As I wait for submissions for the newsletter I would like to take this opportunity to share my thoughts on the 6<sup>th</sup> International Neonatal Nursing conference held in New Delhi, India, September 15-18, 2007.

The conference provided a good opportunity to meet up with neonatal nurses from many countries, renew friendships and make new ones. Having attended 5 of the conferences now I look forward to meeting up with many of the delegates.

The conference was organised by The National Neonatology (NNF) of India which consists primarily of neonatologists with a few nurses as members. I had the pleasure of getting to know the organising committee who were a fantastic group of dedicated individuals who as a collective put together a really important conference. UNICEF was a co-sponsor which indicated the importance placed on the goals and content of the meeting.

Over 900 nurses attended from 30 countries with the majority (750+) coming from India. The audiences were attentive as the enormity of the challenges facing India to reduce the infant mortality rate were the focus of many presentations.

The pre-conference workshops and CME sessions were aimed at up-skilling the education of nurses from all over India. They were also attended by the International community which enabled many ideas to be shared. I had the pleasure of working with the team from Chandigarh in the day long workshop – Equipment and Procedures. I was very impressed at the preparation that went into the workshop and the dedication of the team in sharing their knowledge and at the same time their thirst in acquiring new knowledge. The team was led by Dr Praveen Kumar and consisted of Manjinder Kaur, Shakun Oberoi, Karvinder Kaur, Kamlesh Materia, Mabel Rai and Manpreet Kaur. This team taught me so much in how nurses are challenged and strive for best practice in the face of adversity. Things we take for granted are an exceptional challenge for these nurses.

The CME sessions enabled a sharing of experiences between nurses from many countries and institutions. Sessions were divided into basic and advanced and were a challenge to consider ways of interpreting practices in the developed world into the challenges of the developing world. The chairpersons took on the role of moderator to bring the best out of the presenters and to enable discussions and debates to be held.

The official opening of the conference occurred on Sunday evening with Renuka Choudhary, Minister of State, Women and Child Development presiding. This was an extremely important event as the launch of the Indian Association of Neonatal Nurses took place. This momentous event is the beginning of the recognition of neonatal nursing as a speciality, this will hopefully have some influence on the retention of the skilled workforce in recognition of the need to have skilled nurses caring for sick newborn infants. This vision was the brainchild of Dr Manju Vatsa an exemplary nurse who is an inspiration to all for her dedication and leadership.

The two days of the conference took the audience and presenters on a trip of extremes we were overwhelmed at the enormity of the challenges facing Doctors and nurses in

India. The keynote speaker – Dr Joy Browne from Denver, USA took us on a journey of the evolution of neonatal care from a developmental and family supported focus. She challenged us all to consider ways of involving families in the care of neonates despite their circumstances and the contexts of care provision. Dr Manju Vatsa described the current scenario of neonatal nursing in India. In the face of the high infant mortality rate and neonatal mortality rate the focus is on prevention and education. The biggest challenge is the lack of a professional status of nursing and the concern about the nursing shortage. The focus is on developing a workforce and to train, utilise and retrain the nurses. Prakin Suchaxaya from the WHO outlined some priorities as creating a supportive environment, improving health systems, supporting families, fostering strategic alliances, narrowing the gaps in knowledge and to measure progress.

We were introduced to the role of the IMNCI in India with speakers from WHO and UNICEF. The challenge is to reduce the infant mortality rate which is part of the Millineum goals. This is a big challenge and throughout the conference we heard of various programs that have been implemented to help achieve this goal. Dr Marzio Babilie, Chief Health, Indian Office for UNICEF eloquently presented a plan to move towards achieving the goal, this included education of nurses, workforce planning, the use of stakeholders and to use the strategies of WHO and SEARO to act to improve the health of newborn babies. This is a challenge as 80% of poor families have a home birth in often unhygienic conditions without trained attendees. Only 34% of births occur in institutions which present as a challenge for transporting women and their babies when they are in need of hospital care. The mortality rate for some of the common congenital abnormalities is as high as 56% in some districts when there is a 100% survival in developed countries. A goal is to educate the nurses and retain them in the speciality, currently skilled nurses are rotated to other areas or moved to the colleges as teachers

The abstract sessions were tight and full of interesting presentations and research. There were 36 presentations covering topics such as hypothermia, feeding, practice changes for nosocomial infections, supporting parents, kangaroo mother care, pain, CPAP, computer assisted instruction, transport, positioning. Presenters came from many countries and the shared experiences were good and many of the challenges are the same despite different contexts.

In addition there were 70 poster presentations and as I usually find these presentations were varied and extremely interesting. Often posters are seen as a lesser form of presentation however I believe the visual impact and written messages are far more powerful and memorable. Broad topics included clinical practice issues, family issues, communication, workforce, education and nursing work. Of particular interest for me were posters on ‘breastfeeding for pain management’, ‘Factors affecting mortality among hospitalised surgical neonates’, ‘birth and neonatal care practices in urban slums of Indore’, and ‘trained positive grandmothers as community nurses for home based neonatal care’. Many issues were raised and some very innovative practices described.

On Monday evening we were treated to a cultural event of classical Indian dancing. The performers took us on a journey of creativity and storytelling. For me the ultimate experience while watching the classical Indian dance to the music of Thiachovsky’s

Swan Lake. Spell-binding comes to mind. The international delegates were asked to contribute to the cultural evening and I was given the challenge to bring this together. Everyone embraced the idea and I asked they when each country was called they came on stage and 'performed' something from their own country. We had Kenyan singing, Finish nursery rhymes and local songs and dance. We completed the 'performances' with a Bollywood dance before being inundated by very enthusiastic local youths!

Of course I must mention the food – fantastic. We were treated to the delights of a varied cuisine with new tastes and combinations each meal. The effort that was placed on making us all welcome was fantastic. The social program enabled us to mix and network in an informal environment with local entertainment. At the closing Valedictory I had the honour of representing COINN – the words spoken from various members of the international community as a reflection of the conference will remain with me for time to come. Of particular note were the words spoken by Shela Harani from Pakistan – 'I was anxious about travelling so far and leaving my family, I found a new family who made me feel at home'. I think this is how many of us felt with the friendliness and colour of the participants. Many of us took the opportunity to embrace the colourful and comfortable Indian clothing styles and have never been photographed so much!

On a last note I would like to specifically acknowledge the local organising team for making us all feel very welcome and no task was too big or small when requested. Manju Vatsa, Satish Saluja, Harish Chellani and Arvind Saili were particularly gracious in dealing with many requests and their generosity of spirit is something I will keep for a long time. I would also like to acknowledge Dr Linda Johnston, Chair of the International Scientific Committee, the time she took in liaising with the Indian team and providing international speakers for selected topics was above the call of duty.

If you have not had the opportunity to attend one of these remarkable conferences I urge you to start saving and planning to attend the 7th International Neonatal Nursing Conference in Durbin, South Africa. As the team from NYC have said to me at each of these conference...we will be there, nothing will keep us away.

Written by

Kaye Spence  
COINN Board Member - Australia



Dr N Mathur (Past President NNF), Dr Arvind Saili (President NNF), DR Manju Vatsa (Principle, College of Nursing), Minister Renuka Choudhary (Minister of State, Women and Child Development), DR Harish Chellani (Secretary NNF) and Dr Satish Saluja (Organising Secretary) with the certificate of inauguration of the Indian Association of Neonatal Nurses



COINN members from the international community of Pakistan, Kenya, Canada, Australia and New Zealand



Madge Buss Frank (USA) getting into team work with some of the local nurses



Joy Browne, Kaye Spence and Linda Johnston getting into the Indian spirit



Shahirose Premji (Canada) and Shela Ali Hirani (Pakistan)



Colour rules – Denise Harrison (Australia), Linda Johnston (Australia), Shela Ali Hirani (Pakistan), Kaye Spence (COINN Board Member – Australia), Shahirose Premji (COINN Board Member – Canada) and Joy Browne (Keynote speaker – USA).



The workshops provided opportunities for 'hands-on' skills



Nurses from New York City who have participated in most of the International Conferences



Kaye Spence with Manjinder Kaur from Chandigarh.



Bollywood takes over as the all were invited to participate



Part of the opportunity at international events is to share in the beauty of the country.



Manju Vasta from India handing over the flag to Ruth Davidge from South Africa as a symbol for the 7<sup>th</sup> International Neonatal Nursing Conference to be held in Durbin in 2010