

Presidential Address
The 43rd All India Obstetric and Gynaecological Congress,
Lucknow, December 27, 1999

Women's Health - Our Commitment



Prof. Alokendu Chatterjee

Your excellency, Sri Suraj Bhan, Governor of Uttar Pradesh - our honoured Chief Guest, Dr. U. Ton M. Rafei, Regional Director Family Health & Research, WHO, my dear friend & immediate predecessor Dr. Mehroo Hansotia, distinguished outgoing & incoming Vice Presidents of the Federation, Dr. Chandravati, Chairperson, Organising Committee, Dr. Shyam Desai, Secretary General FOGSI, outgoing & incoming Jt. Secretaries & the Treasurer of FOGSI, Dr. Vinita Das, very energetic Organising Secretary of this Congress with her ever-smiling dedicated team, my revered teachers & mentors, illustrious past Presidents of FOGSI, august Galaxy of International and national Guests, fellow delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen-

Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them-so said Shakespeare. I am neither great nor did I achieve any greatness; but the members of FOGSI have decided to thrust greatness upon me; a dwarf in comparison to the great national & international stalwarts who before me have glorified this most coveted & prestigious office of the President of FOGSI.

My words fail to thank and express my sincere gratitude to my revered teachers, colleagues & friends all over the country, who inspired me to go ahead. I salute them all. Today is a very special day in my career as I assume the office of the President of FOGSI-with a sense of humility & gratitude. It is a special distinction & a long cherished dream come true.

FOGSI Today

Standing only few hours away from the end of this memorable 20th Century we find our FOGSI - a gigantic force of over 15000 specialists, spread across our country, through 141 Societies. We have a great responsibility in building our Nation to a greater height, through our dedicated service to the millions of women of India.

I am fortunate to have a galaxy of eminent members who have been chosen to help me & the Federation-next year. I sincerely welcome the incoming Vice Presidents Dr. Duru Shah, Dr. Sudip Chakraborty & Dr. Maya Sood. Our dynamic Secretary-General Dr. Shyam Desai, along with two Jt. Secretaries, Dr. C. N. Purandare & Dr. Partha Mukherjee, will be assisting me & the committee, and the finance will be looked after by Dr. P. K. Shah. I am sure that FOGSI will get the invaluable services of President Elect FIGO, Dr. Shirish Sheth, our most energetic immediate Past President, Dr. Mehroo Hansotia, President Elect FOGSI, Dr. Kamini Rao and one & only Dr. D. K. Tank. FOGSI Journals are in best hands headed by Dr. R. D. Pandit. I welcome the advice of all our Past Presidents, 26 Committee Chairpersons & the ICOG board. Most important of all -I solicit the advice, suggestions & help of all our members for improving the activities of the Federation. Whenever you wish, you may write to me or phone me - I will be too pleased to answer. Your experience will enlighten our path. I am also looking forward to work with FOGSI office staff headed by Ms. Bhandarkar.

Our heritage

As early as 1926, an idea of forming an all India society engaged the minds of the forefathers of our profession. 1st AICOG was held at Madras in 1936 - long before FOGSI came into being. During the 6th AICOG, again at Madras, FOGSI was born on 6th January 1950, with 5 Founder members - Ahmedabad, Bengal, Bombay, Madras & Punjab. During the year 1999, there were 143 societies affiliated to FOGSI with a total membership of about 15,000 members. Today, after 50 years we are very proud of our heritage so delicately woven by some of the Doyens of our profession, like Sir K. N. Das, Dr. Ida Scudder, Dr. Bamandas Mukherjee, Dr. N. A. Purandare, Dr. Chamanlal Mehta, Sir A. L. Mudaliar, Dr. J. Jhirad, Dr. Subodh Mitra, Dr. V. N. Shirodhkar, Dr. M. K. Krishnamenon, Dr. K. M. Masani, Dr. B. N. Purandare, Dr. S. B. Ankelsaria - to name a few. We pay our homage to these great men & women of our century.

As we never celebrated our "birthday" i.e. 6th January, suggestions were around to incorporate this auspicious day by shifting the FOGSI congress days from 27th-30th December to 6th-9th January. It was agreed at the last AGM to shift the dates. To remind ourselves of our heritage, I propose to insert the words "50 years" in all our communications during year 2000.

FOGSI and Women's Health

Ladies & Gentlemen, Obstetricians & Gynaecologists are unique among all the health professionals. We, by virtue of our specialised knowledge & skill, are natural ally to women, supporters & friends of women, in their efforts to improve the quality of their lives. We are, for many women, specially in India, the first & even the only point of contact with health services. This gives us an unique opportunity. Let us not confine ourselves only as organ healers, or as technicians playing with newer gadgets & computers or as surgeons with the skill of midwifery. We can play a bigger role in the Society. I echo the voice of Prof. Fatallah when he says "I came to the conviction that obstetrician - gynaecologists have a responsibility as well as, an opportunity, to evolve their profession to meet the women's needs, women's perceptions and

women's perspectives. Women need us - as a profession that listens to them, that respects them, that provides them with comprehensive health care, and a profession that stands behind them as they struggle against the social evils that impact on their physical, mental & social health" He also says that "The road ahead for our profession should take us from obstetrics and gynaecology to women's health".

Dear friends-let us all the members of FOGSI, take a vow on the eve of the new millennium, that united we stand for the women's health in India. We have the knowledge, the strength & the skill to serve the nation-to look after the health of our women. Surely we can do it. Can't we?

I am delighted to announce that "Women's Health" will be the theme of FOGSI for the year 2000 and as per the standards set by my esteemed predecessors - all FOGSI communications, letterheads, envelopes & Journals will carry the message "Women's Health - our commitment: FOGSI theme of 2000".

I appeal to all the FOGSI Members present here tonight & all those who are not present here, to dedicate themselves to the cause of women's health. Our destiny lies with the well being of women. If we love our nation, if we want to stand tall among the world citizens - we have no other alternatives but to fight to the last, for the cause of women. Remember, woman symbolises the continuity of human race. She is the nucleus of our society.

To spread the message of women's health I propose to hold, a World Congress on Women's Health on 10th, 11th, & 12th, November 2000 at Calcutta. I invite all of you to join the Congress & help the cause of women. I expect all our friends from abroad, present here tonight, will kindly consider joining us again in November next year to contribute & share their knowledge & experience, to improve the women's health.

Our Duty

I had the opportunity to visit many societies of our

Federation in last few years. A common thing that surfaced - was a communication gap. It was a revelation that some even feel neglected. I promised to myself to try & help them, if I can, with larger participation and with much better communication with them. With this idea in mind i.e. to improve our communication with all the members of FOGSI - we had sent letters to Presidents & Secretaries of all Societies of FOGSI with a questionnaire. The response is tremendous. Newer and Brighter suggestions are pouring in. This will certainly help us to place our priorities in the agenda of actions for the year 2000. My sincere thanks to all the Societies for a prompt reply. Needless to say, that, reply from the remaining societies will follow soon. We will surely try our best to implement many of your suggestions as quickly as possible.

Task Ahead

Let us for a minute consider the Himalayan task ahead of us in the new millennium. Our top priority is to stop the almost vertical rise of our population curve. Surely we do not want to be the "World Champions" in this area. What can we do to stabilize our population? The ideal method will be to address the issues of unmet need by identifying these needs according to lifecycle approach. This includes paying special attention to the needs to the adolescents---both unmarried & married. It is necessary to change our concept from 'focus on demand' to 'focus on need' & to take account of gender perspective which involves paying attention to the needs of both men & women. Most important is the necessity of involving men in efforts to meet the needs of women. Involvement of men will prevent violence against women & will help to establish the Woman's Right - that is due for centuries.

Next in the agenda, is our unacceptably high maternal mortality. This is perhaps the paradox of the century, that we know it all-how & why it happens-even then we can't stop or slow down this colossal preventable death of young women. Maternal Mortality, soon after the colonial rules, was 2000 per 100,000 live births, is now 430 per 100,000 live births. This amounts to 148,000 deaths per year or 1 in every 5 minutes. 12 years ago WHO expressed their vision in Nairobi, by saying "We

face a tragedy of multiple causes and we must confront the challenge with a multiple strategy. We must stop behaving as if there were a single magic bullet that could slay this dragon" (Maternal death). It was thought then, that maternal mortality could be lowered by improving the women's status & her educational opportunities coupled with fertility control and by establishing, in the antenatal visits, a relation between those involved in the health care system (professionals or not) and the pregnant women. This idealistic vision of safe motherhood did not have the expected outcome. It resulted in responsibility & motivation being taken away from the main layers in the maternal health programme; they are decision makers, funding agencies & the obstetricians. Today, more than ever, it is abundantly clear, that the solution lies in the hands of the Obstetricians. To reduce the maternal mortality & morbidity, Essential Obstetric Care must be accessible to all pregnant population. This means that in very area of the country, there must be professionals i.e. physicians, midwives and nurses, trained by the obstetricians, who will be able to provide life saving medical & surgical procedures during the hour of urgent need. This goal will be attainable only if, the politicians, the public health professionals & the obstetricians join forces and work together. The funding agencies should contribute to the development of facilities, where basic obstetric care can be practised. Our health authorities should encourage & support the training of adequate health professionals and their proper remuneration at first referral hospitals with motivation. We the obstetricians should be conscious of the fact that our first mission is to make available high quality essential & emergency obstetric services for our women throughout the country. If we do not fulfil these criteria, the Safe Motherhood Initiative may well remain orphan for the next 12 years! We, the members of FOGSI, promise to devote ourselves in all spheres of life to achieve success in these areas.

If we analyse, some other important basic demographic parameters of our population, we find that, our crude birth rate has dropped from 40.8 in 1951 to 26 per 1000 population in 1998 - target being 21 by 2000. The total fertility rate was 3% in 1998 compared to 6.1% in 1951 & target being 2.3 (source *The state of World Children 1998*).

When the world makes a balance sheet of our performance in the first 50 years following independence, in relation to women's health & population growth, I hope they consider that 50 years is not a big time to completely reverse the health scenario in a country like India. Similar situations are not rare in human history. America's population grew by more than 3½ times, every 40 years - for first 80 years - which was more than we grew (3 times) in the same period. 50 years after American Independence the crude birth rate in U.S.A. was 51.4 (1830) & TFR was 6.55 (1830) (Source - The Reader's comparison to American History, Ed. Fonner, E., Gerraty, J., 1991, P-104). Both are more than the corresponding period in India since 1947. This is no way to make a point, that ours is not a situation with "irreversible shock" but definitely on a "salvagable" position, only if, I repeat only if, we work harder with honesty. Most important is the will of the people at large & opinion leaders in particular. Here we definitely find a shift in the right direction. Our duty is only dedicated work - "Karmanye Adhikar Aste". (The Gita) - You only have the right to work.

RCH Programme

Since the early part of this year, FOGSI is conducting well structured workshops on Reproductive & Child Health Care under the patronage of Govt. of India. Our sincere thanks to the tremendous work done by two of our past Presidents, namely Dr. D. K. Tank & Dr. Mehroo Hansotia. Some NGOs are supporting such workshops in some parts of our country. But our country is vast & diverse with nearly 500 districts. We must find, ways & means, to cover all the districts of our country in a time bound programme, say by 2/3 years. To achieve this we need, massive efforts & supports - over & above the support from our Government. I appeal & call up-on all concerned, NGOs & Pharma Industries, to join hands with FOGSI to spread the message of R.C.H. throughout the nook & corner of all our villages and help the women of our country & thus be proud of being a partner with FOGSI to serve the nation. You have the means & we have the knowledge - let us wake up & dedicate ourselves. Dear members - here we can surely think seriously to have NGOs & the pharmaceutical industry as FOGSI

"corporate members".

FOGSI & FIGO

Year 2000 should be a memorable year for FOGSI - because during the first week of September, one of our illustrious Past President will take the chair of PRESIDENT of FIGO at Washington, during the 16th World Congress. We applaud the glorious success of Prof. Shirish Sheth - who has done us proud to be an Indian. I appeal to you all fellow members to make an effort to witness this glorious moment at Washington. Let everybody feel the presence of FOGSI at the FIGO. FOGSI, a founder member, will look forward to take more active interaction with FIGO.

FOGSI & AOFOG

Our association with Asia Oceania Federation - legendary. AOFOG entrusted our Federation with several workshops in Safe motherhood and Reproductive health for years together. You will be glad to note that AOFOG has decided to hold the Asia Oceania Congress of 2002 in India - at the Garden City of Bangalore. We always have the privilege to have AOFOG representation in all our AICOG's. We are grateful to Prof. S. S. Ratnam, Secretary General and live-wire of AOFOG, for his contribution to all the previous FOGSI Congresses. I think it will be a good idea to have one AOFOG organised Scientific Session during each AICOG.

FOGSI & SAFOG

Our association with this relatively new organisation - South Asian Federation of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists - is strengthening each year. During this Congress SAFOG has organised one Scientific Session. We are proud to have the President & the Secretary General of SAFOG with us.

Ladies & Gentlemen-the year 2000 will be very busy for all our members to uphold the motto of our Federation-Service, Knowledge & Friendship. I as the president of the Federation need your whole hearted active co-operation to raise our beloved FOGSI to a much greater

height. Your service to the humanity is FOGSI's wealth, your update knowledge is our strength & your friendship is legendary.

I thank all the members of the 43rd AICOG's organising committee, headed by Prof. Chandravati, with a team of full time dedicated workers. I should have named many more of these workers but the limitation on time does not permit me. I will do injustice if I do not mention the very hard work done by Prof. Vinita Das, the Organising Secretary. Greatness of these two ladies are, that they never take it wrong to any advice given to them for this congress. I know what they had to face for the success of this congress. I thank you and all your colleagues.

My predecessors will agree that any of them had, to devote a lot of time on the road to become President & also during the Presidentship. This meant away from home many weekends in a row without bothering about the usual domestic problems. For this I am indebted to my dear wife Krishna, a member of FOGSI & my children

& my Parents. Without their blessings & support, I wouldn't have managed the show. I sincerely thank them all.

I come from the City of Rabindranath Tagore. So, it is appropriate that I conclude with a comment from Gurudev, written in 1924 in an essay called "Women".

*Life should be like a lamp
where the potentiality of light
is far greater in quantity than
what appears as the flame.*

Women symbolises the flame.

Ladies & Gentlemen at the dawn of the new millennium. I wish each of you & your family a happy & peaceful New Year - New Era-with lots of success. God bless you all.

Long live FOGSI