

Report to FPSA

Funding to support attendance at Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine Annual Meeting

8-11 March 2016

I am extremely grateful to FPSA for providing funding to support my attendance at the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine Annual Meeting (SAHM 2016). I was able to contribute to the professional development committees attending in my capacity as chair of the awards committee as well as act as master of ceremonies at the prestigious awards ceremony.

The meeting offered a breadth of presentations across three tracks; clinical, professional development and research. It offered outstanding opportunities to network with professional colleagues and participate in small group discussions regarding research. This year over 900 delegates registered from all over the world.

Clinical sessions focused on the management of substance abuse, eating disorders, health care transition, ADHD, transgender care, sports medicine, sleep and cardiovascular health for teens. Foundation level presentations provided evidence based reviews of the core issues whilst the advanced presentations focused more on research and treatment advances.

There were a number of outstanding plenary lectures. The Gallagher lecture (**Adolescent Brain Development in Context: Implications for Health, Education, and Social Policy**) was delivered by Professor Ronal Dahl . He presented a masterly summary on the explosion of advances in several areas of basic science that inform human development—including rapid expansions in understanding social, affective and cognitive neuroscience. More specifically, there has been a growing interest in understanding how learning and experience—particularly during sensitive periods of development—can influence connectivity among maturing neural circuits in ways that can have enduring effects on behaviour and emotion. Broadly, this work seeks to discover how individual experiences (such as the effects of parenting, peers, neighbourhoods, schools, media, exercise, nutrition, adverse experiences etc.) can sculpt these developing neural systems during periods of relative plasticity. While there has been general recognition that the first few years of life represent a major period of neuroplasticity for humans, there is growing evidence that the onset of puberty heralds another sensitive period of learning, particularly in relation to social and emotional learning. A deeper understanding of these adolescent neuromaturation processes—and the social contexts that actively shape them—can provide new insights for targeted early intervention and prevention. The presentation summarised key aspects of Dr Dahl's research. It considered several of the challenges in translating this research to inform clinical and social policy. The presentation gave examples of how research in developmental social and affective neuroscience is relevant to understanding adolescence. It helped attendees to understand the role of social contexts in shaping the neural processes during this sensitive period of development and placed the research within a larger trans-disciplinary developmental science of adolescence. (Links: Center on the Developing Adolescent: <http://developingadolescent.berkeley.edu>)

Following the Gallagher lecture Dr Dahl and his co-investigators presented a workshop (Leveraging transdisciplinary developmental science of adolescence to inform adolescent health) The workshop built on the morning's presentation by Dr Dahl and invited a discussion about how advances in developmental science can be leveraged to improve adolescent health services. The session examined: advances in developmental science including developmental social and affective neuroscience; the developmental factors that contribute to changes in adolescent social motivations, social contexts, and social roles; how pubertal changes affect motivational learning; and how advances in communication neuroscience can inform public health practice. It also included specific examples about how developmental science has informed specific hypothesis related to the treatment of anxiety and depression, sleep problems in adolescence, and the delivery of sexual health preventive services. There was an opportunity for the audience to participate in the discussion sessions.

The second plenary (Can Law Impact Adolescent Health? A Global Inquiry) was given by Terry McGovern, JD. The session explored the impact of law on adolescent health outcomes and the rationality of various laws looking at countries from different regions. The session highlighted inconsistencies in laws governing sexual and reproductive health access and obstacles to access in countries with plural legal systems. This thought provoking session helped attendees recognise the impact of law on adolescent health and highlighted variations in legal standards globally that affect adolescent health. The presentation explored complications for sexual reproductive health in countries with plural legal systems

Two of the hot topics session were of particular interest. The first (Why Texting Matters) was given by Bob Filbin, Chief Data Scientist who presented Crisis Text Line: a 24/7 service for people in personal crisis by text. Since launching in August of 2013, volunteer Crisis Counselors have exchanged over 13 million messages with people in crisis. Crisis Text Line uses data in two ways: (1) internally, to improve the quality of the service, and (2) externally, to improve the crisis space as a whole. Researchers can now apply for access to the largest crisis data set in the country. This dynamic and exciting presentation clearly demonstrated the unique value of a crisis text line for adolescents. Data showed how being a tech and data-first crisis service leads to better care for users. It is also possible to apply for access to Crisis Text Line's Dataset as a researcher. The second presentation (Should We Ban Tackle Football?), presenter Albert C. Hergenroeder, MD, FSAHM was particularly pertinent given recent newspaper articles arguing against tackling in rugby in UK schools. The presentation reviewed the head injuries associated with tackle football (American football) and their short and long-term implications. It described the prevalence of head injuries in student athletes who play football and research on the implications of head injuries sustained by football players. Interestingly the data suggested that it may not be helpful to ban touch football in early years as more injuries occur when young people are banned from playing at earlier years.

Another very relevant presentation was The Global Refugee Crisis by Susan Martin, MA, PhD. The presentation discussed the global refugee crisis, with particular focus on Syrian refugees and displaced persons. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports a global population of 60 million refugees and displaced persons, the highest it has counted since the end of World War II. The largest crisis is related to the Syrian conflict. There are currently about 8 million internally displaced persons within Syria, 4 million refugees in neighboring countries and about 180,000 Syrian asylum seekers in Europe. The presentation examined the causes of the global refugee crisis, assessed the principal obstacles to the protection of refugees and displaced persons and explored prospects for improving responses for refugees and displaced persons.

The professional development activities provided skill based educational sessions for new and established health professionals as well as ethics, health policy and advocacy efforts as well as an opportunity to hear from new initiatives affecting adolescent health. **Using social media to add power and reach to your adolescent health advocacy** led by Dr Jack C. Rusley, MD. Social media platforms--such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram--are increasingly becoming points of access to health information for youth, parents, and policy-makers globally. As multi-disciplinary adolescent health advocates, this provides us an opportunity to provide meaningful, evidence-based, cutting edge information about youth in context to a large audience, instantaneously. Our participation in this brave new world has the potential to build trust between youth and institutions, and increase the visibility and credibility of adolescent health providers and advocates. The workshop presented ideas on how to take social media as an advocacy tool to the next level. A strong focus was placed on incorporating social media into your existing schedule, with time-saving and user-friendly tools like Hootsuite and Tweetdeck that allow even the most novice of users to schedule and keep track of posts. The presenters presented ideas on how to focus your topic, identify a policy target, develop a social media presence, understand and utilize "best practices" in social media, and plan a social media strategy to achieve goals. They taught the basics of Twitter analytics, which allows users to track the impact of messages.

I have increased my followers on twitter by nearly 25% as a result of attending the workshop!!!

SAHM 2016 provided a combination of educational and networking opportunities as well as inspiring examples of individual and community approaches to adolescent health and well-being which creates opportunities for collaboration in the future.

I am grateful for the support that enabled me to attend the meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Deborah Christie
Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Professor in Paediatric and Adolescent Psychology