

Asia's first-ever conference on cervical cancer a spectacular success

First time IFCPC 2021 is hosted in Asia

IFCPC working towards elimination of cervical cancer by 2030

Emphasis on importance of timely screening and vaccination

The 17th World Congress of International Federation of Cervical Pathology and Colposcopy (IFCPC 2021) organized by the Indian Society of Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology from 1st July to 5th July was a spectacular success. This prestigious event was held for the first time in Asia in the 50 year of history of this international organization. It was a proud moment for India to host the first virtual conference of IFCPC which was attended by more than 1,000 delegates and speakers from over 42 countries all over the world. Numerous experts in the field, including gynaecologists, gynaec-oncologists, pathologists and microbiologists attended the conference. There was enthusiastic participation by renowned researchers, world famous experts, medical students, nurses and also by policy makers from Government of India.

A satellite consensus meeting for developing a road map for India for cervical cancer screening was held on 25th of June and inaugurated by Hon'ble Governor of Telangana and Hon'ble Lt Governor of Puducheri Dr (Smt) Tamili Sai Soundararajan, who herself a gynaecologist, delivered her talk on women empowerment. Mr N Yuvaraj , Director of National Health Mission updated the audience about present and future policy of Government of India for prevention and treatment of cervical cancer. Many national and international experts of this field including Dr Sankaranarayanan, Dr Partha Basu from IARC, WHO, Dr Patti Gravitt from USA, Dr Woo Yin Ling from Malaysia and Dr Suzanne Garland from Australia shared their experiences and opinion for development of a cervical screening policy using testing with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) in line with the WHO goal for Elimination of Cervical Cancer. This meeting provided a perfect springboard for interaction of these experts with representatives of the Government. Recommendations from this meeting were released at the conclusion of the Congress.

The five day long scientific feast IFCPC 2021 was inaugurated by the Hon. Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, who called for adopting a multi-pronged strategy to arrest the growing incidence of cancer--from launching an aggressive awareness campaign on the need to lead a healthy lifestyle to holding regular health screening camps at the community level. Emphasizing on collective action, Shri Naidu said, "Let us act together to prevent cancer and save lives."

Noting that cervical cancer is ranked as the second most common cancer in Indian women, the Vice President pointed out that cervical cancer is both preventable and curable. He said that early diagnosis through routine screening of apparently healthy women has led to a phenomenal reduction in the global burden of the disease. "If we adopt a comprehensive

approach to prevent, screen and treat cervical cancer, it can be eliminated as a public health problem,” he added.

Highlighting that cervical cancer can be prevented by the means of vaccine, Shri Naidu said, “the Anti-HPV vaccine administered to young girls has been seen as a proven tool in the prevention of cervical cancer.” He also launched a special edition of ‘Indian Journal of Gynaecological Oncology’ during the event.

The Vice President appreciated the medical fraternity and healthcare professionals for their noble service during the ongoing pandemic, he said, “The entire world is indebted to the medical fraternity for their selfless service during the ongoing battle against the pandemic.”

Shri Naidu lauded the International Federation of Cervical Pathology & Colposcopy and the Indian Society of Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology for their commitment and efforts towards reducing the burden of cervical cancer globally. He conveyed his best wishes to the organizing team of IFCPC 2021 who are striving to save lives, millions at a time.

The former Health Minister of India, Dr Harshvardhan, also emphasized the need of training health personnel including doctors and paramedical staff in prevention of cervical cancer and treatment of precancerous lesions. He announced that it is a matter of pride that India is one of few developing countries that has formulated the national cancer control program. India as a leader in Asia has formulated the operational guidelines for screening of some of the common cancers like cervical cancer, breast cancer and oral cancer. He emphasized the commitment of India toward WHO resolution of elimination of cervical cancer by 2030.

On 1st July, four pre-congress workshops were held that were attended by more than a thousand gynaecologists, pathologists, basic researchers, medical students and paramedical staff. The workshop “Comprehensive colposcopy and treatment of precancerous lesion” covered from basics to treatment of difficult cases. The presentations from national and international faculty, and interactive discussion helped budding colposcopists learn the techniques of screening and treatment.

A Workshop on “Cytology and HPV” was conducted by illustrious national and international cytologists to highlight the advances on new biomarkers and new techniques of detection of Human Papilloma Virus, that is responsible for 99 percent of cervical cancers.

Training of Trainers workshops were an academic feast for trained Colposcopists who will be training other gynaecologists in screening techniques as well as treatment. The “Surgical Options for CIN & Cervical Cancer” was well attended by hundreds of gynaecologists and gnaeconcologists who learnt surgical skills in treatment of precancerous conditions of cervix and cancer from stalwarts with the help of lectures and video presentations.

From 2nd July to 4th July scientific deliberations, panel discussions, hot debates and five brainstorming quizzes were the main attractions of the conference. The conference had more than 300 national & international speakers; 257 research papers were presented in the conference. Experiences from different countries regarding screening techniques and HPV vaccination were shared. Honouring the legends ceremony felicitated senior scientists for their life time achievements.

Highlights of IFCPC 2021 were discussions over role of Artificial Intelligence in low resource countries where there is scarcity of trained Colposcopists and pathologists. Experts from Australia and Singapore discussed their experiences on how they have moved from cytology-based screening to primary HPV testing, which is a more sensitive test for cervical cancer screening recommended by the WHO. Various studies were presented which showed that presently practiced co-testing that is HPV testing with the Pap smear is not economically beneficial and instead a primary HPV screening should be done. Many countries shared their experiences of self- sampling for cervical cancer screening by HPV testing which is more relevant during the COVID pandemic.

“Screen the mother, vaccinate the daughter” at the same visit was the hashtag given by the South Asian Federation of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, a large body of gynaecologists in South East Asia. New options of vaccination like nonavalent vaccine and importance of vaccination of males was highlighted. New classifications for staging of cervical cancer and classification of surgeries based upon that was discussed. Fertility sparing surgery in early stage of cervical cancer in young woman willing for issue was also discussed.

An Open Forum on 4th July generated a very enthusiastic response from audience consisting of students, teachers, heads of institutions, NGOs and cancer survivors. A panel of experts dispelled myths about the cervical cancer vaccine and cervical screening.

At the end of conference the IFCPC flag was handed over by the Immediate Past President of IFCPC, Dr James Bentley to the Present President Dr Carlos Perez Moreno for next conference to be held in Colombia.