

Foreword Message

PROF JEAN CALLEJA-AGIUS

In Europe, about 5 million live births occur each year. While this is generally considered as a positive life experience for mothers and their families, it is estimated that 18% of women will develop depression during pregnancy, 13-20% of women will develop postnatal depression within the first 12 weeks of childbirth, and for 8% of women, this extends beyond the first year. This negatively impacts both the mother and the offspring, as well as the rest of the family.

As described in the article by Ms Gabrielle Grixti, psychiatric conditions such as post-natal depression are prevalent among all societies, irrespective of age, background and education. Of course, women with low socio-economic status are more at risk due to concurrent factors, such as poor nutrition, poor hygiene and malnutrition. Alcohol abuse, while prevalent among all strata of society, can exacerbate psychiatric conditions, and vice-versa, spiralling down into a vicious cycle. Worse still is the consequent foetal alcohol syndrome which may affect the offspring, as outlined in the article authored by Mr Robert Pisani.

Health inequalities are very much present in modern day society. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted this discrepancy in access to basic healthcare even more. Maternity care has of course suffered the brunt of the pandemic, limiting the access to care and antenatal follow up. This meant that conditions like congenital infections for example, may not be picked up early. Congenital infections, including cytomegalovirus, can severely affect the developing foetus, as highlighted in the review by Ms Maia Rapa.

Fertility awareness and infertility treatment are also very important in the management of women of reproductive years. Premature ovarian failure, which has been reviewed by Ms Emma Camilleri, is one of the possible causes of infertility in young women. This condition also has long lasting effects on the patient's health, due to the detrimental effects of early menopause.

In the case of medical students and future medical doctors, SCORA has an important role to play in raising awareness about the importance of professional fertility counselling, as well as maternity care, from pre-conception till birth, and beyond. Access to safe antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care is a basic human right.

Childbirth is a major life event for mothers and their families, and it is one of those moments where a patient is most vulnerable. SCORA, which I am proud to have been the one to set it up way back in 1997 in my third year of the MD course, is very well-placed to empower medical students to be the voice of the vulnerable, and compassionate to those who seek medical help, even when in desperate situations when there is little offer.



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