

Blog

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As President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, I am proud to lead a truly global organisation. We may have our headquarters in London, but our activity and influence reaches far beyond the UK, with Members and Fellows around the world working tirelessly to improve healthcare for women and girls everywhere.

Wherever we are in the world, it is a busy period for the whole of our specialty. The pandemic has touched us all. Obstetrics has not stopped, yet it has been much harder to deliver a safe service during the pandemic and especially while trying to restore other services. The pressures on gynaecology, especially for those managing and prioritising waiting lists, are also significant. This is something I have observed in my own unit, here in the UK, but I know that these are challenges faced by doctors and other healthcare professionals throughout the world.

In mid-June this year we hosted our first entirely digital RCOG World Congress. Over 3000 delegates attended from more than 85 countries, enjoying 240 sessions over 4 days from their homes and places of work. As always, one of the main highlights was the annual meeting of our International Representative Committee and international Liaison Group Chairs. The shared achievements, commitment and resilience demonstrated by the global O&G community cannot be underestimated, in what has been a truly unprecedented 12 months for us all.

The fact that Congress attracts such a diverse group of delegates from all over the world really shows the global nature of the College, and this is something I am keen to develop further. Our Centre for Women's Global Health works to achieve our goal of improving women and girls' lives, through the delivery of respectful, high quality and accessible health care all over the world. The RCOG's new five year strategy has further strengthened this mission.

One of our priority areas is the advancement of gynaecological health. Gynaecology is a neglected area of global health. Many gynaecological conditions are highly stigmatised and surrounded by secrecy, including sexually transmitted infections, fistula and infertility. Given this stigma and secrecy, it

is perhaps not surprising that gynaecological conditions cause more mortality and morbidity than many of the other global health focus issues including malaria, HIV/AIDS and TB. This is particularly the case in countries where resources are scarcer.

The RCOG is committed to helping eliminate the suffering of women and girls from preventable gynaecological conditions. We have developed a unique training programme focused on essential skills for multi-disciplinary health professionals working in low-resource contexts to support them in the delivery of high-quality, respectful gynaecological care. The training has been designed to work effectively where resources are limited, ensuring it delivers value for money for the health system.

The training encompasses several gynaecological topics, including cervical cancer, contraception, abnormal uterine bleeding, infertility and fistula and focuses on basic skills to identify symptoms and treat women earlier.

Another priority area for the College is the promotion of safe abortion and post abortion care, to the extent permitted within the law. An estimated 25 million unsafe abortions occur every year, making it one of the leading causes of maternal mortality and morbidity worldwide. However, abortion related deaths are largely preventable by providing access to contraception, safe abortion care (performed in line with clinical best practice), and timely post-abortion care. Through our Making Abortion Safe programme, we are working with healthcare professionals to expand access to safe abortion care for all women and girls who need it.

To ensure the O&G community can continue to improve the health of women and girls around the world, we have joined with partner organisations to speak out about recent cuts to UK overseas aid spending from 0.7% of Gross National Income to 0.5%.

In a letter to the Prime Minister we warn that cutting the resources that the UK provides to lower and middle-income countries will cause irreversible harm to the health and wellbeing of women, girls and their families. We know that these cuts will disproportionately impact women and girls and that the lost funding would have helped prevent around

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250,000 maternal and child deaths.

The pandemic has shown that we all have a shared interest in improving public health across the globe, so we will continue to call on the Government to reverse these damaging cuts and reaffirm its commitment to improving access to quality healthcare for women and girls around the world.

Improving the health of women and girls, wherever they are, no matter their circumstances, is at the heart

of everything we do at the RCOG. We have made great progress through training and education, speaking out on key issues and working with our extensive network of Members, Fellows and partners – locally, nationally and internationally - but there is always more to do. We will continue to strive towards our ultimate goal of improving women's health and the clinical practice of obstetrics and gynaecology in the UK and across the world.