
International Women’s Day (IWD) - a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future - is celebrated on 8 March each year. The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) reaffirms its support for its valuable objectives.

FIGO - the only global organisation bringing together 124 gynecological and obstetrical societies - recognises that good health plays a critically important part in enabling women to excel throughout their lives in all areas and it strives to secure and promote the very best services in maternal, newborn and reproductive health, while improving the practice of gynecology and obstetrics.

The IWD 2012 theme - ‘CONNECTING GIRLS, INSPIRING FUTURES’ - encompasses the importance of the right to a thriving young adulthood, a time in a woman’s life when good health takes on fresh importance. FIGO’s work with women right across the life cycle, from girlhood through to womanhood, is based on one overall clear vision - that women of the world achieve the highest possible standards of physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health and well-being throughout their lives. It pursues its mission through advocacy, programmatic activities, capacity strengthening of member associations and education and training.

FIGO’s dedication to women’s health is illustrated by strong commitments to:

- Encouraging all efforts for raising the status of women and for advancing their role in all issues related to women’s health.
- Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and services through education, research and advocacy, as well as through the provision of accessible, efficient, affordable, sustainable and comprehensive reproductive health services.
- Emphasising the importance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 - FIGO is committed to accelerating its efforts and activities to reach MDG targets, especially in the area of safe motherhood and newborn health.
- Continually upgrading the practice of gynecology and obstetrics through research, education and training, and by maintaining the highest levels of professionalism and scientific and ethical standards.
- Improving communication with and between member associations and building the capacities of those from low-resource countries through strengthening leadership, management, good practice and the promotion of policy dialogues.
• Strengthening capacities to enable societies to play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of sustainable programmes aimed at the improvement of care available to women and newborns, especially for poor and under-served populations.

• Recognising the importance of collaborative efforts for advancing women’s health and rights - FIGO is committed to strengthening partnerships with other international professional organisations, UN agencies, and the public/private sector to achieve its objectives.

The distinctive phase of young adulthood presents particular challenges for the global health community, including FIGO, and several of its initiatives focus on areas that are integral to, or can profoundly impact on, girls’ overall health and their safe transition into adulthood: eg the importance of good quality Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) and the scourges of obstetric fistula and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

**Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH)**

• Adolescents aged 10-19 years account for 23 per cent of the overall burden of disease (disability-adjusted life years) due to pregnancy and childbirth

• Young women between the ages of 15-19 are particularly vulnerable to HIV because of gender inequalities, sexual violence, early marriage, intergenerational relationships and more limited access to education

• Young women consistently report less contraceptive usage than men, due to unequal power in negotiating safer sex or restrictions on access to services

FIGO is committed to promoting healthy practices during adolescence and taking steps to better protect young people from health risks. This is critical to the future of countries’ health and social infrastructures, and the prevention of health problems in adulthood. It is currently working towards strengthening the capacity of its member associations to support ASRH interventions at the national level via a series of global regional workshops attended by key global health professionals.

**Fistula**

• An obstetric fistula is a hole between a woman's birth passage and one or more of her internal organs. Most fistula sufferers are young women - many still in their teens - and are likely to live with their condition for upwards of 25 years. There are at least two million women currently living with fistula throughout the developing world

FIGO has produced a special Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual aimed at fistula surgeons, which will enable them to help deliver quality care and expertise to the many women who suffer from this affliction. Currently FIGO is establishing training centres in many African countries for the prevention and treatment of fistula.

**Female Genital Mutilation**

• Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) refers to several different harmful practices involving the cutting of the female genitals. It is estimated that about three million girls, the majority under 15 years of age, undergo the procedure every year

FIGO’s 1994 Montreal General Assembly Resolution on FGM encourages FIGO’s societies to urge national governments to sign up to international human rights agreements condemning the practice and to support the work of national authorities, NGOs and intergovernmental organisations. The FIGO Committee for the Ethical Aspects of Human
Reproduction and Women’s Health has two guidelines opposing FGM, the most recent concerning medicalisation (London, 2006).

On this International Women’s Day 2012, FIGO calls on the global health community, including NGOs and professional associations, to redouble their efforts to help women - whatever their age and status - achieve optimum physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health, so that they can live confident and productive lives in the years to come.

**Sources/resources:**


http://www.fistulafoundation.org/whatisfistula/faqs.html

http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices3.html

http://www.figo.org/projects/adolescent_sexual_and_reproductive_health_initiative

http://www.figo.org/projects/fistula_initiative


http://internationalwomensday.com/