FIGO reaffirms its support for the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula (23 May 2014)

The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) reaffirms its support for the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula (23 May 2014).

In 2003, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and partners launched a global Campaign to End Fistula in line with international targets to improve maternal health, with the aim of reducing the number of obstetric fistula patients, especially in low-resource countries.

23 May was duly designated as the ‘International Day to End Obstetric Fistula’. The Day, observed every year, began on 23 May 2013, and in that year coincided with the 10th Anniversary of the Campaign.

An obstetric fistula - a hole between the vagina and rectum or bladder that is caused by prolonged obstructed labor - most commonly occurs among women who live in low-resource countries, who give birth without any access to medical help. The condition results, in nearly all cases, in the death of the baby and leaves the woman suffering from a range of health problems which include chronic incontinence. Traumatic fistula can be caused as a result of sexual violence. Fistula often has severe psychosocial and socioeconomic consequences that are brought on by social segregation, which in many cases results in loss of livelihood, isolation, and feelings of shame and despair.

FIGO President Professor Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran said: ‘FIGO - the only global organisation representing national societies of obstetricians and gynecologists - has a vision that women of the world achieve the highest possible standards of physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health and wellbeing throughout their lives. It is committed to working for the benefit of all women, particularly those in low- and middle-resource countries who suffer needlessly from highly distressing - yet treatable - conditions such as fistula.

‘Through its ongoing Fistula Initiative, FIGO is actively involved in the process of building the capacities of fistula surgeons in accredited training centres, using the “FIGO Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual”. Training fellows are chosen from countries with a high prevalence of fistula, and the Initiative is dedicated to helping them acquire the knowledge, skills and professionalism needed to prevent obstetric fistula, and provide high quality surgical, medical and psychosocial care to women who have incurred fistula, whether during childbirth or because of inflicted trauma.’

He added: ‘One important component of the Initiative is to develop a reliable data collection system in all fistula centres for monitoring, evaluation and research, as these tools will greatly assist healthcare professionals in the prevention and treatment of this terrible condition.’

Resources: