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Mumbai Obstetric and Gynecological Society Holds first conference of the Year

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The conference convened healthcare providers to advance sexual and reproductive health

On 6-7 April 2019, the Mumbai Obstetric and Gynecological Society (MOGS) hosted its first conference of the year, which focused on sexual and reproductive health. The conference reached approximately 2,000 healthcare providers who serve Mumbai's 57,26,442 women. It was held at the Taj Santacruz Hotel and coincided with World Health Day on 7 April.

In addition to MOGS, conference organizers included: The Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and The Asia & Oceania Federation of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (AOFOG). The conference was a platform to address diverse sexual and reproductive health issues, such as family planning, abortion, LGBTQ rights and menstrual hygiene. Conversations explored the dilemmas obstetricians and gynecologists face in daily practice and how they can best support women and men's sexual and reproductive health needs.

Dr Nandita Palshetkar, President, FOGSI said, "Today, millions of people across India, especially women, have an urgent unmet need for quality, sexual and reproductive health services. Barriers to access include lack of awareness, stigma and legal restrictions. Yet it's heartening to see thousands of Mumbai's healthcare providers come together who are dedicated to breaking down these barriers. Together, I am confident that we can empower more women to lead healthy, productive lives."

Dr Jaydeep Tank, Secretary General, FOGSI said, "Throughout my career, I have witnessed first-hand how sexual and reproductive health services allow women to realize their dreams. And they're not just good for women. They are key to building strong and equitable societies. It's been proven time and time again that when women have access to quality, sexual and reproductive healthcare and can choose what to do with their own bodies, families, communities and entire nations thrive."

To inspire action from obstetricians, gynecologists, civil society and media, the conference delved into specific challenges that women and men face. One issue at the top of the agenda was family planning.

Rowshan Ara Begum, Chair Sexual and Reproductive Health Committee, AOFOG said, "Family planning, which allows people to make decisions about when and how to have children, is a fundamental reproductive right and cost-effective pathway to sustainable development. Every dollar spent on family planning can save up to six dollars for achieving other development goals. It's time to make universal access to family planning an international priority.

Another key theme was safe abortion. The conference explored the myriad of reasons why women resort to unsafe abortion and how healthcare providers can navigate this issue.

Dr Anibal Faundes, Immediate Past Chair, Working Group on Preventing Unsafe Abortion, FIGO said, "Abortion is completely safe when administered by a well-trained provider. And in many places around the world such as India, it is legal. So, it's unfathomable that women still die every day from unsafe abortions. Healthcare providers can play a critical role in addressing this problem by promoting accurate information about where and how women can access safe services, dispelling myths and creating a supportive environment for women who choose to terminate their pregnancies."

The conference also drew upon global perspectives, recognizing that gaps in sexual and reproductive healthcare are not unique to India. Globally, they account for nearly one fifth of the burden of illness and premature death, and one third of the illness and death among women of reproductive age.

Highlighting the value of global exchange, Sir S Arulkumaran, former President of the RCOG and British Medical Association emphasized, "Many countries face related, pressing challenges in the field of obstetrics and gynaecology – from improving access to contraception to removing harmful legal restrictions around abortion. Conferences such as these are important opportunities to focus on shared concerns, exchange knowledge and identify potential solutions that raise the bar of sexual and reproductive healthcare around the world."

All in all, the conference provided an opportunity to unveil the gaps that remain in sexual and reproductive healthcare, explore practical ways that providers and other stakeholders can help close them, and rally participants around empowering more women with the ability to make decisions about their own bodies.