

## IASP NEWSLETTER

### Highlights of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Pediatric Pain, 2010



The 8th International Symposium on Pediatric Pain, which is the conference of the Special Interest Group on Pain in Childhood of the International Association for the Study of Pain, was held in tropical Acapulco, Mexico from March 7-11, 2010. Over 600 researchers, clinicians, and trainees from around the world met to share knowledge on recent research and advances within the field of pediatric pain, with a specific focus on advancing services in developing countries. For the first time, more than one third of the delegates were from developing nations, which was of particular importance as the overarching theme of the meeting was to share knowledge of pediatric pain with all cultures.



During the opening ceremony, an indigenous group performed a cultural ritual using conch shells to help bring knowledge from “all four corners” of the globe to the delegates of the meeting. The audience spontaneously followed in the beautiful ritual, raising arms and connecting their spirits to share knowledge with all cultures.

The meeting began with an excellent Education Day with world renowned speakers on pediatric pain. Throughout the meeting, plenary sessions and workshops explored topics in pain ranging from infancy to adolescence. The extensive program kept scientific researchers and clinical practitioners engaged despite the beautiful beach-front location. Below we highlight some of the main themes that were addressed in the sessions at the meeting.

First, the importance of age and developmental stage when assessing and treating a child in pain was a common theme throughout the conference. Many workshops emphasized that research concerning children is not necessarily generalizable to pain experienced by toddlers and infants: taking into account the language, cognitive, social,

emotional and motor development of a child seems very important. Toddlerhood was a developmental stage of particular interest. One report explored the empathic abilities of toddlers. It was also suggested that assessing pain in toddlers can still be improved. Although behavioral assessment is often the first step, more research is needed to investigate other discomforting issues associated with pain in both toddlerhood and childhood such as distress, separation anxiety, and fear of strangers. Furthermore, several presentations discussed pain in early ages, including pain in fetuses and preterm neonates, and its consequences on development at older ages.

A second theme that arose during the meeting was the importance of understanding the larger social context in which childhood pain occurs. Parental soothing behaviors and actions during painful medical procedures were a common point of discussion but remain largely under-investigated. Some preliminary results presented at the meeting indicated that parental catastrophizing and parenting stress may be important constructs in influencing the perseverance of a child's pain. Much more research is needed in this area in order to untangle the complex interactions between caregivers and their children in pain.

Third, several presentations discussed knowledge translation and the challenges of implementing changes based on the best empirical evidence available. In addition, results from intervention programs from all over the world were shared and, despite cultural differences, challenges found were very similar. For example, it was agreed that education is a very important step in the process; however, on its own, it is not sufficient for improving clinical practice. Changing practice requires a multidisciplinary team, including health professionals, patients, families and community members, which focus on education, assessment and implementation.

Various sessions also discussed pain assessment and treatment options for treating children in pain. In terms of assessment, actigraphy (an instrument to map a child's physical activity) and electronic diaries were discussed as promising methods to understand functional disability in children with pain. With regards to psychological treatment, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Hypnosis, exposure, and internet interventions, were all discussed as useful tools for

helping children in pain. School attendance was highlighted as one of the best predictors of coping with chronic pain in children.

However, the meeting did not only focus on psychological themes; several workshops also discussed fundamental research investigating processes important in the development and duration of childhood pain. Although we have made strides in understanding some of the mechanisms underlying pain, more research is needed to further understand what leads to the onset and persistence of pain. It was highlighted that these mechanisms may differ across pain conditions. Pharmacology, neurobiology, drug access and efficacy were also discussed as important. Some take-home messages from these workshops included that it is a myth that analgesics diminish diagnostic accuracy. In addition, the beneficial analgesic effect of sucrose for toddlers and babies was also a key point of discussion.

This meeting also saw the official launch of ChildKind International, a global initiative to improve the quality of pain control for children in healthcare facilities worldwide. The organization will award special designations and accreditations to institutions that follow specific pain relief policies in order to establish global standards of children's pain management. Although the management of infant, childhood and adolescent pain is considered a priority in many cultures, assessment and management of pain is inadequate in many countries. Through its network of leading researchers and policy makers, ChildKind International hopes to improve pain relief for children around the globe.

Like the workshops and plenary sessions, the poster sessions, with nearly 100 posters in total, covered numerous relevant topics and were a great opportunity to disseminate important knowledge in a condensed way. In addition, the Media Festival illustrated some important issues that were raised in the several plenary sessions and workshops of the meeting. Experts from different countries showcased movies exploring the lives of children living with different kinds of pain, as well as their families. Several focused on rehabilitation programs for children with chronic pain.

Last but not least, the social events were a great success and excellent opportunity for networking. The gala dinner, for example, was held underneath a star filled sky where people could meet each other and dance to a lively mariachi band.

The opening reception:



The Acapulco Princess Hotel:

Finally, as a result of the tremendous hospitality of the local organizing committee and the excellent selection of presented work by the scientific committee, the meeting was truly successful in promoting the exchange of knowledge and research and in promoting discussion around future challenges and directions related to childhood pain between nations around the world.



Submitted by:

Line Caes, MSc, PhD Student, Department of Experimental-Clinical and Health Psychology, Ghent University, Belgium

Nicole Racine, BSc., M.A. Student, Clinical Developmental Psychology OUCH Lab, York University, Canada

Vivian Caroline Klein, PhD, Department of Neuroscience and Behavior, University of São Paulo, Brazil

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Acapulco by night:



A view of the Acapulco bay:

