

2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCHIZOPHRENIA (IConS II)

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Walking on the foot steps of the 1st International Conference on Schizophrenia (IConS I), Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF) organized the 2nd International Conference on Schizophrenia (IConS II) on October 13-15, 2006 Chennai, India. It was really an outstanding conference and for me to attend this, was indeed a stimulating experience. But before looking at the conference itself, I will like to introduce SCARF.

SCHIZOPHRENIA RESEARCH FOUNDATION (SCARF)

SCARF is the acronym for the **Schizophrenia Research Foundation** which since 1984 has committed itself to schizophrenia care and research. Founded by a group of philanthropists and mental health professionals led by Dr. M. Sarada Menon, an internationally known psychiatrist, SCARF has established itself as a center of repute in rehabilitation and research. It is a Collaborating Centre of the World Health Organization for Mental Health Research and Training and the WPA anti-stigma site. Currently Dr. R. Thara, who is one of the founder members of SCARF, has been the director of SCARF for 11 years.

SCARF provides a comprehensive, totally free treatment package comprising of Out-patient care, free medication for the needy, a well worked out, individually tailored rehabilitation programme and an employment bureau which seeks to find jobs for the disabled.

SCARF'S Awareness materials

SCARF has developed awareness and educational material for the families in the form of booklets, "Facts for the Family" on Crisis Management and medication and a film on the same topic called "FACES". It has also worked to create awareness among the health workers and School teachers.

IConS II of SCARF:

I had read about SCARF and the IConS I conference but I was amazed when I received the invitation letter for the conference well in time to go on with my visa process. The conference was due on Oct.13 to Oct.15, 2006 on the theme "Blending schizophrenia care with research - Global perspectives".

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A total number of 372 delegates participated in it with more than 80 from outside India. There was representation from 15 countries (UK, USA, Canada, Norway, Sri Lanka, Iran, Malaysia, Romania, Pakistan, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Hong Kong and India).

The important feature of the conference was the first international short film competition & film festival 'Frame of Mind' dedicated to erase the stigma surrounding mental health issues, held on 6th October to 8th October 2006, a week before the conference. The contest sought to counter negative, inaccurate and clichéd images of people with mental illness and to create clean, accurate, realistic and optimistic view point.

The inaugural session was on the 12th October followed by 3 intensive days of research and clinical presentations by researchers from all over the world, coupled with a display of posters representing many disciplines. I really enjoyed the opportunity to be a part of all the important sessions as there was a lively forum to discuss various issues regarding Schizophrenia.

Day 1, 13th October, 2006:

The day started with the first plenary session chaired by A Jablensky, Professor of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience, University of Western Australia. I reached the conference venue, Savera Hotel well before the start of the Plenary. The conference opened with a presentation by Saraceno Bernadetto, Director, Division of Mental Health, WHO, on 'Psychiatry between broad holistic thinking and narrow bio-medical practice'. He emphasized that Psychiatrists should promote comprehensive services which put service users at the centre of attention. Then was the turn of Mohan Isaac from Australia, who compared Australia and India's approach in 'Delivery of mental health services in Australia and India: Any lessons to be learnt?' He was followed by a delightful lecture by Max Birchwood, Director, Birmingham Early Intervention Services, UK on 'Do as I say; Cognitive therapy for command hallucinations'. It was a trial carried on 38 patients and the results supported the efficacy of cognitive therapy for command hallucination and were consistent with social rank theory.

Then started 2 simultaneous symposia in both the halls. On one side it was a symposium 'Intervention for psychoses'. Esteemed speakers like C. Andrade, Judith Jaeger and Tim Lambert highlighted different pharmacological interventions for schizophrenia. I attended the

symposia in the other hall on, 'Early Psychoses: Concept and Intervention'. Eric Chen and Christy Hui from Hong Kong discussed the issue regarding their own perspective. Byron Good from Harvard, USA was the last speaker to deliver his lecture on 'Rapid Onset Psychoses in Java: Reflections on 10 Years of Research'.

The post lunch symposia in hall 1 was 'Panel on Rehabilitation: Global Trends'. The speakers concluded that the psychiatric rehabilitation care delivery system in developing countries is in a predicament now. It needs to review its position, direction of future development, define its priorities and draw an action plan to meet the changing needs of people living with schizophrenia. The symposia in hall 2 was on 'Topics of Interest' and the speakers expressed their views on various topics.

In the final plenary session of the day, Vikram Patel, Reader in International Mental Health, from Goa, India, talked about 'Scaling up treatments for chronic psychoses in developing countries' and Vaughan Carr from Newcastle, Australia, discussed 'A Neuroscience Network for Schizophrenia Research'. Both the lectures were really very interesting and stressed the need for providing essential antipsychotic medication for those suffering from schizophrenia.

Day 2, 14th October, 2006:

The first plenary session started with John McGrath from Queensland, Australia, who explained 'Variations in the incidence of schizophrenia: data versus dogma' and then Graham Thornicroft, from Kings College London, UK highlighted 'The Global Pattern of Discrimination against People with Schizophrenia'.

The post lunch symposia was on 'Indian Research' chaired by IRS Reddy. Ajit Avasthi and Sandeep Grover from Chandigarh, India produced their original research in an excellent way. I really enjoyed the presentation of Sandeep Grover on 'Cost of Illness of Schizophrenia', as JPPS recently published a review article on the subject by the same author and I had gone through it many a times. JK Trivedi from Lucknow, India presented his case on 'Burden of Care on Key Relatives of Schizophrenia'. In hall 2, the symposia was on, 'Genetics and Schizophrenia' chaired by Smita Deshpande. The symposia was highly informative and ended the day on a thoughtful note.

Day 3, 15th October, 2006:

In the first plenary A Jablensky scholarly discussed, 'Schizophrenia: One Disorder or Several?' He pointed that phenotypic variability and genetic heterogeneity have been confounding the search for the causes of schizophrenia since the inception of the diagnostic category.

The morning symposia was on 'Rural Mental Health' chaired by S Rajkumar from Newcastle, Australia, who himself along with other speakers elaborated

various problems regarding rural mental health in a comprehensive manner. In the other hall, the symposia was on 'First Episode Psychoses' and the speakers including Max Birchwood were very thoughtful in their expressions.

On the final afternoon, the symposia was on 'Community mental health'. Dr. R Thara and other speakers were very elaborate during the symposia. In the hall 2, the symposia on 'Current Topics' was very interesting and had diverse topics for the lectures including, 'Late life schizophrenia' by Tataru Nicole from Romania.

There were 100 posters put up over the complete duration of conference and were a treat to watch concerning various important issues.

Post Conference workshop:

Another highlight of the conference was the workshop on 'Research Methodology and Clinical Trials' which was held on 16th October 2006. The Faculty included Dr. Tonmoy Sharma, Dr. Roger Bullock and Dr. Jyotsna Shinde.

The course was in two parts

Part 1: Research Methods in CNS studies including Clinical Trials

- Protocol writing, study design, Sample size calculation etc
- Can academics and business go hand in hand?
- Clinical trials: overview, drug development process, key stakeholders, international and national guidelines.

Part 2: Assessment of Cognition in Clinical Practice and clinical trials using computerized batteries

- What is cognition, How is it assessed, Why is it required?
- What to look for in a protocol?
- Cognition assessment paper pencil tests vs. computerized tests.
- Advantages of electronic data capture.
- Various players in the industry who offer cognition assessment.

The second half of the course included a hands-on training on a computerized clinical tool for clinical practice and clinical trials.

In a nutshell, the conference was very well organized and all the scientific sessions and programmes were well in time. The hospitality of the organizers was commendable and the professionalism was up to the mark. For their marvelous efforts, hats off to them.

The conference gave me the opportunity to meet even those researchers whose articles are regularly being published in JPPS and interaction with them was productive and after coming back from the conference, I am now eagerly looking forward to attend IConS III.