



Dear member,

Over the last month the IASP board has completed two major projects. One of these was the first IASP Asia-Pacific Regional conference, which you can read more about on this page. The other is the World Suicide Prevention Day 2004. We know that many of you were involved in various activities on September 10th – all with the common aim of putting suicide prevention higher up on the public agenda and to create a broader understanding of and societal basis for suicide prevention. Reports sent us from many parts of the world (see www.iasp.info) give us a clear impression that some of these goals were largely accomplished. The media attention was impressive – and constructive! The media focussed both on the messages put out from IASP internationally and on local and national messages from the respective countries' experts, clinicians, volunteers, authorities and organisations. IASP collaborated closely with the WHO in Geneva, and got great support from the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence.

World Suicide Prevention Day, 10. september 2004
Saving lives, restoring hope

A special session at the WHO Headquarters on Sept 8th gathered representatives from many UN organisations and NGOs on areas important to suicide prevention. The messages from IASP was well received, and actually made the headlines in many leading mass media. Probably even more important, though, are the many grassroots events that took place on the World Suicide Prevention Day this year. We are amazed and greatly encouraged and inspired to carry on this work.

Your Executive Committee is currently evaluating the 2004 events and has already started planning for 2005. In this process we welcome all creative input, experiences or views you may want to share with us. Perhaps you would even want to give some of your time?

Lars Mehlum
President

The 1st Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the International Association for Suicide Prevention Oct 6-8, 2004 Bangkok, Thailand – A first for the IASP

Everyone agreed it was a great conference, superbly organized in such a short time. Bangkok 2004 was a wonderful beginning for this new endeavor to bring the IASP to regions which hitherto have been at the margins of IASP activity. It was only a year ago that the idea for this conference was mooted at the IASP World Congress in Stockholm. I had a chat with Dr. Prakarn (the Thai National Representative) who readily offered to try and host the first regional meeting. Back in Thailand he received the support of the local psychiatric community and most of all the Royal College of Psychiatrists of Thailand. From then on things went at a dizzy pace and this October more than 300 people attended this very interesting meeting in the Land of Smiles. Most were, understandably from Thailand, with some participants from the Australasian region.

The sister of the Thai King graced the opening ceremony. The presence of Her Royal Highness the Princess ensured wide publicity for the conference as well as exposure for the IASP and for suicide prevention activities in Thailand. Our President, Professor Mehlum gave the keynote address, and numerous papers on a wide array of topics relating

to suicidal behavior were presented in this 2,5 day conference. Six members of the IASP Board were present and presented papers. The Board also took the opportunity to hold a Board Meeting during the conference. The highly interesting social program included a dinner cruise on the Chao Praya River. The food was good; the hospitality fabulous.

This conference is expected to bring many direct and indirect benefits, not only to our Association, but also to the host country, through networking and exchange of ideas over national suicide prevention strategies and other aspects of suicidal behavior.

It is envisaged that a Regional Conference in the Asia-Pacific region would be held every 2 years. Countries interested to host a future regional meeting: could you please get in touch with me as soon as possible, so that we can work out the details.

Congratulations to our colleagues in Thailand for organizing such a successful conference. We appreciate their hard work.

T. Maniam, Chair of National Representatives



IASP Board members and local organisers

IASP Taskforce Postvention

IASP Taskforce Postvention held its second open meeting at the 10th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour, on 27 August 2004 in Copenhagen. The meeting opened with an introduction on the objectives of the Taskforce and a follow-up of the September 2003 meeting. Important expectations of the current attendees were to have more contacts, to hear ideas and experiences of other people and to improve one's practice. In addition, participants felt a need for more conference presentations and publications in this field. Participants concluded that it is important to have this platform and to continue with holding open meetings. Please find the complete minutes from Taskforce meetings: www.med.uio.no/iasp/html/news.html

Karl Andriessen, Chair

IASP WORLD CONGRESS



WELCOME TO
IASP World Congress
13-16 sept 2005
Durban, South Africa

“Genetics of suicidal behaviour”

Chair: A. Marušič
Members: Andrej Marušič, Jonathan Evans,
Kees van Heeringen, Saska Roškar, Maja Zorko

Goals:

- To promote studies of genetic aspects of suicide ideation and behaviour among suicidologists on one side, and to promote genetic studies of suicide ideation and behaviour among behavioural geneticists on the other.
- To build a bridge between suicidologists and behavioural geneticists in order to exchange information, ideas and plans, and to work jointly towards future targets; thus forming an independent discipline of genetic suicidology.
- To tackle misconceptions about the involvement of genes in the development of suicidal ideas and behaviour (e.g. idea that investigating genetic aspects of suicide means believing the suicide gene exists; idea that genetic proneness to suicide cannot be changed; misconceptions that genetic is about biological, whereas environmental is about psychosocial).

Current state of things:

1. Collecting evidence

- Evidence regarding a role of genetic risk factors for suicide comes from epidemiological and populational genetic observations; family, twin and adoption studies; and molecular genetic investigations. The proportion of variance that is attributable to heritability comes close to 50%.
- As with other complex traits it is reasonable to argue that the liability to commit suicide is contributed to by multiple genetic and environmental factors and only those whose liability at some point exceeds a certain threshold actually manifest as completed suicide. Interactions between these factors occur at several stages in the development of suicidal behaviour.
- Some genetic factors in suicide should be related to impulsivity and aggressiveness, which have their effects independently of, or additively to, a mental disorder.

- The proposal that there is a genetic aetiological component to suicidal behaviour does not mean that environmental factors are not also important. If anything, it would make it even more necessary to control these risk factors in populations of high genetic risk. Unless both risk factors are taken into account simultaneously, it is unlikely that any suicide reduction intervention will be effective.

2. Reporting and publishing the collected evidence

Over the last two years number of published papers on genetic aspects of suicide ideation and behaviour has increased exponentially. A great number of these publications has been prepared by researchers closely connected to the IASP Task Force. If not, they were consequently invited to become involved in our Task Force. Of great importance is that the number of review papers has also increased since the pioneering one by Roy et al in 1997.

3. Organising and attending meetings, symposium and congress

- The IASP Task Force became one of the co-organisers of the 2nd and 3rd International Meetings “Suicide: Interplay of Genes and Environment” in Portoro, Slovenia in 2002, where geneticists, investigators of environmental factors and suicidologists met for the second and the third time. As it was already organised at the 1st International Meeting back in 2000, presentations and discussions were divided into three main themes: genetic aspects of suicide, environmental aspects of suicide, and interplay of both genetic and environmental suicide risk factors. Majority of those actively involved at the meeting were either members of IASP or, which is also important in terms of building bridges, members of the International Society of Psychiatric Genetics. At least one issue of Crisis would normally contain the most outstanding papers from these international meetings, e.g. No. 2 in Vol. 22 and No. 3 in Vol. 23.

The 4th meeting is being organised already in May 2005 in Gent (due to the increased interest in the field we are upgrading our meeting from biennial to yearly gatherings) (see www.suicide-interplay.be)

- Suicidologists who are actively involved in the International Society of Psychiatric Genetics have started to work together towards a special session on Suicidology Genetics at the following World Congress on Psychiatric Genetics.
- One of our most important message to all organisers of the future meetings, symposiums and congresses is that suicidology genetics does not fit only into biological aspects of suicide (as it tends to be organised at the gatherings of suicidologists), nor does suicidology genetics fit only into genetics of affective disorders (as it tends to be organised at the behavioural genetics meetings). Suicidology genetics is also about the interplay of genes and environment, including psychosocial factors and non-affective disorders.

4. Other

The task force collaborates with a group of suicidologists working on ethical aspects of suicide by pointing at ethical aspects of genetic knowledge in the field of suicidology (e.g. it will soon become important to protect the confidentiality of data on individuals, from whom material for molecular genetic research of suicide will have been taken; informed consent has to be provided; in case of forthcoming collaborations with pharmaceutical industry, anyone involved in the genetic investigation of suicide behaviour will have to be aware of the precise roles of the researchers, as opposed to the clinicians; the question of whom, when - sufficient validity? - and how - with or without genetic counselling - to present information once genetic testing becomes more commonplace).



WSPD 2004 – activities in Malaysia

In Malaysia we decided to observe the WSPD as a month-long activity. It began with a Workshop for health care workers in early September, and ended with a Media Workshop in mid October.

6 September: 1) Workshop on Suicidal behavior and Prevention – Prof Lars Mehlum 2) Forum on Religion and Suicide – the 4 major religions in Malaysia (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity) were represented.

7 September:

Lecture on Research in Suicide – Prof Lars Mehlum

13-15 September: Workshop on Preparation of Public Awareness material on suicide, and press kit with local information (modified from IASP material)

From 17 September: Weekly Radio Talks on Suicide and Depression – for 4 weeks – conducted by Prof Maniam, Ms Hanizam, Dr. Reddy, Prof Rosdinom.

28 September:

Consultation with media personnel on Media Workshop

9 October: TV Talk on mental illness including suicide – Tamil language program – by Prof. Maniam & Dr. Kanni

14 October:

Media Workshop on Reporting news about suicide

The one-day Media Workshop was the main event. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Malaysia, officiated at the launch. He personally signed invitation letters to News Editors of all print and electronic media to ensure that the senior people who make decisions about the news will attend (and not the junior reporters). The program included two talks, a workshop and two press conferences:

1. Talk on risk factors and statistics on suicide – Dr. Azhar Salleh (IASP member)
2. Talk on the impact of media reporting on suicidal behavior – Prof T. Maniam (IASP National Representative)
3. Press conference on Suicidal Behavior (requested by the electronic and print media) – Prof. T. Maniam
4. Workshop on Guidelines on Media Reporting

5. Press Conference with the Honorable Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, Malaysia.

About 60 editors, journalists and reporters attended the workshop. A senior editor chaired the session on preparing the guidelines. The journalists made many interesting suggestions. WHO guidelines were modified and adopted. By the beginning of next year we would have prepared a document detailing Malaysian guidelines.

Overall this was a very successful month for suicide prevention activities especially in sensitizing the media to their special role. Subcommittees have been set up to monitor results over the coming months. I would like to convey special thanks to the Ministry of Health, Family Health Division for their enthusiastic support without which all these activities would not have been possible.

Report submitted by:

Prof. T. Maniam, National Representative