

## The Global Work of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO)

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### *Abstract*

FIGO – the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics – is the only organisation that brings together professional societies of obstetricians and gynecologists on a global basis. Founded in 1954, in Geneva, it currently has member societies in 124 countries or territories. Its vision is that women of the world achieve the highest possible standards of physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health and well-being throughout their lives.

It is dedicated to the improvement of women's health and rights, the reduction of disparities in healthcare available to women and newborns, and advancing the practice of obstetrics and gynecology. This is pursued through advocacy, programmatic activities, capacity strengthening of member associations, education and training.

The article outlines and explores the governance, partnerships, Committees, Working Groups, and main Initiatives of this globally important organisation.

*Key words:* FIGO, obstetrics, gynecology, reproductive, sexual, health.



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The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) – established in Geneva on 26 July 1954 by Professor Hubert de Watteville, the founding

father of FIGO – is a unique organisation, the only international professional body that brings together 124 obstetrical and gynecological associations from

all over the world. The Federation has a Vision, Mission, Values and Goals.

### **Vision**

FIGO has a vision that women of the world achieve the highest possible standards of physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health and well-being throughout their lives.

### **Mission**

FIGO is dedicated to the improvement of women's health and rights and to the reduction of disparities in health care available to women and newborns, as well as to advancing the science and practice of obstetrics and gynecology.

The organisation pursues its mission through advocacy, programmatic activities, capacity strengthening of member associations and education and training.

### **Values**

The values of the organisation are those of innovative leadership, integrity, transparency, professionalism, respect for cultural diversity and high scientific and ethical standards.

### **Overall Goals**

FIGO's overall goals are: improvement of the health and well-being of women and newborn children worldwide; raising the status of women and enabling their active participation to achieve their reproductive and sexual rights with access to efficient education and services throughout their life cycle; and upgrading the practice of obstetrics and gynecology through education, training and research to maintain a high standard of professionalism and ethical adherence.

### **Commitments**

FIGO is committed to:

Encouraging all efforts for raising the status of women and for advancing their role in all issues related to women's health.

Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and services through education, research and advocacy, as well as through the provision of accessible, efficient, affordable, sustainable and comprehensive reproductive health services.

Emphasising the importance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 – FIGO is committed to accelerating its efforts and activities to

reach MDG targets, especially in the area of safe motherhood and newborn health.

Continually upgrading the practice of gynecology and obstetrics through research, education and training, and by maintaining the highest levels of professionalism and scientific and ethical standards.

Improving communication with and between member associations and building the capacities of those from low-resource countries through strengthening leadership, management, good practice and the promotion of policy dialogues.

Strengthening capacities to enable societies to play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of sustainable programmes aimed at the improvement of care available to women and newborns, especially for poor and under-served populations.

Recognising the importance of collaborative efforts for advancing women's health and rights – FIGO is committed to strengthening partnerships with other international professional organisations, UN agencies, and the public/private sector to achieve its objectives.

### **Governance**

The organisation – currently based in London, the UK, and registered as a charity (a non-profit organisation) – is a democratic body. A General Assembly – comprising delegates from each paid-up member society – meets every three years on the occasion of the World Congress (member societies' votes are cast according to a sliding scale based on membership).

The Executive Board – comprised of 24 member societies and six FIGO officers – meets at least once every year, and is elected by free vote at the Assembly.

All activities have been achieved with only three full-time employees until 2007 – however, due to recent rapid expansion, there are now 15 staff members, headed by a full-time Chief Executive, who oversees special projects, and the IT, Communications and Publications departments. An Administrative Director oversees the Finance, Events and Meetings and Administration departments.

### **Activities**

The organisation pursues its mission and commitments through special projects; partnerships; advocacy; programmatic activities conducted by its Committees and Working Groups; capacity strengthening of member associations; and education and training.



FIGO Executive Board representatives, Mexico, 2011

## Partnerships

FIGO participates in the ‘Alliance for Women’s Health’ (formerly the ‘FIGO/WHO Alliance for Women’s Health’), on which it sits with other agencies to define the most effective role for FIGO in dedicated areas, and to define areas of collaboration. The Alliance members include: the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), The World Bank, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), and the International Paediatric Association (IPA). Areas of activity include a pre-congress workshop on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and collaboration on the World Report on Women's Health (launched at each triennial FIGO World Congress).

FIGO has Category 1 consultative status with the United Nations, and is in official relations with 21 non-governmental organisations dedicated to women’s health care.

## FIGO Committees

### *Capacity Building in Education and Training*

The main objectives include providing leadership in the educational and training activities of FIGO and promoting the educational objectives of FIGO in the field of women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Current activities include the preparation of pre-Congress workshops for the FIGO World Congress and the conducting of workshops at conferences and meetings across the world (eg hands-on training programmes on PPH and MIS in Asia and Africa) in collaboration with national societies and regional federations.

### *Ethical Aspects of Human Reproduction and Women's Health*

The main objectives include the studying of contemporary ethical issues emanating from research and

practice in obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive medicine, and recommending guidelines on ethical problems in training, education, science and the practice of obstetrics and gynecology. Current activities include the development of a Bioethics Curriculum in reproductive and sexual health for developing countries.

### *Fistula*

The main objectives include co-ordinating FIGO's activities in the field of fistula treatment and prevention, and producing effective proposals for the possible expansion and enhancement of the invaluable work undertaken in the prevention and treatment of fistula. Current activities include the dissemination of the FIGO Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual aimed at trainers and individual practitioners in low- and middle-income countries, and the implementation of structured fistula surgical training programmes in up to five countries in sub-Saharan Africa using a standardised training curriculum.

### *Gynecologic Oncology*

The main objectives include the issuing of a triennial global FIGO Report on Gynecological Cancer Staging, Classifications and Good Practice Guidelines, and Guidelines on Combating Cervical Cancer. The

Committee conducted several meetings and workshops on gynaecological oncology in various parts of the world in collaboration with national, regional and international societies. There are plans to develop a Working Group on Breast Cancer.

### *Reproductive Medicine*

The main objectives include creating access to quality reproductive medical care for all women of the world and developing evidence-based, culturally sensitive, cost effective policies and guidelines that are accepted as standards for increasing access to quality reproductive medical care in all countries of the world. Current activities include the development of 'The FIGO Fertility Tool Box™', which will assist the ob/gyn community in helping to prevent infertility and apply evidence based and cost effective infertility treatment.

### *Safe Motherhood and Newborn Health*

The main objectives include acting as a focal point for all FIGO activities related to safe motherhood and newborn health, overseeing FIGO's Saving Mothers and Newborns Initiative, providing technical support to the FIGO LOGIC team – see below – and monitoring/participating in international initiatives aimed at improving maternal and newborn health such as the Prevention of PostPartum Hemor-



FIGO LOGIC Initiative Annual Review Meeting, Addis Ababa Ethiopia, 2010

rhage Initiative (POPPHI), the Global Alliance to Prevent Prematurity and Stillbirth (GAPPS) and the Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP).

### *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights*

The main objectives include educating and increasing awareness among ob/gyn professionals about women's sexual and reproductive rights, involving them in an evaluation of their practice to assess whether they are protecting and promoting these rights, and developing a robust curriculum on women's sexual and reproductive rights that can be adopted and adapted for medical schools across the world in order to help raise awareness of these problems among their students. Current activities include the promotion of the curriculum at various national and regional conferences.

### **FIGO Working Groups**

FIGO has three Working Groups of specialists to review and explore the issues surrounding Menstrual Disorders, Pelvic Floor Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery and the Prevention of Unsafe Abortion.

Detailed information on all Committees and Working Groups can be found at <http://www.figo.org/about/commsand> and [http://www.figo.org/about/working\\_groups](http://www.figo.org/about/working_groups)

### **FIGO Initiatives**

FIGO has a large number of projects:

**LOGIC Initiative** (*Leadership in Obstetrics and Gynecology for Impact and Change*) (2008-2013, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). Its goal is to improve maternal and newborn health in low-resource countries through strengthening the role of obstetric and gynecological national associations.

### **FIGO LOGIC Initiative Annual Review Meeting, Addis Ababa Ethiopia, 2010**

Over five years, FIGO hopes to enable these member associations to play a catalytic role in making positive changes in policy and practice and improve maternal and newborn health services for under-served populations. The countries involved are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria and Uganda.

**Misoprostol for Post-Partum Haemorrhage in Low-Resource Settings Initiative** (2010-2014, funded by Gynuity Health Projects)

Its goal is to advocate for and disseminate evidence-based information on misoprostol for post-partum haemorrhage for providers and clinical policy makers (in order to influence policy and practice, and to help normalise misoprostol use for PPH).

**Prevention of Unsafe Abortion Initiative** (2007-2012, funded by an anonymous donor)

Its goal is to help reduce the number of women dying as a result of unsafe abortions – accounting for 13 per cent of annual global maternal deaths – and hundreds of thousands of women suffering long-term complications.

**Fistula Initiative** (2008-2011, funded by UNFPA and FIGO; Feb 2011-June 2012, funded by USAID)

Its goal is to disseminate the FIGO Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual aimed at trainers and individual practitioners in low- and middle-income countries, to ensure high quality clinical training for the care of women with obstetric fistula, and to increase capacity of service sites and staff to provide comprehensive management and treatment of fistula through a programme of training of trainers and support to the training centres.

**Saving Mothers and Newborns Initiative** (2006-2011, funded by SIDA and FIGO)

Its goal is to build and sustain the capacity of the ob/gyn and midwifery societies in the participating developing countries to conduct essential projects relevant to the promotion of safe motherhood and the improvement of maternal health, with the aim of reducing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, contributing to the achievement of MDGs 4 and 5 in 10 countries: Haiti, Peru, Kenya, Uganda, Uruguay, Ukraine, Nigeria, Moldova, Kosovo, and Pakistan.

**Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Initiative** (2008-2011, funded by UNFPA)

Its goal is to strengthen the capacity of FIGO member associations to support ASRH interventions at the national level. This aim complements FIGO's wider objective of strengthening its capacity to support national societies and, alongside this, increasing national societies' capacity to play a major role in advocacy, training, policy development and reproductive health programmes.

### **FIGO publications**

FIGO's specialist publications include: the International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics (including special supplements such as HPV); the FIGO Newsletter; the World Report on Women's Health; the triennial Annual Report on Gynecological Cancer; Recommendations on Ethical Issues; Staging Classifications and Good Practice Guidelines; and the Three-Year Report.

## **Finances**

FIGO's main sources of revenue are World Congress income, publication royalties, grants and donations and annual dues from member societies.

## **FIGO World Congress**

Every three years since 1958, FIGO's World Congress has rotated through five continents. The site is chosen by vote at the General Assembly six years in advance.

The sites since 1991 have been: Singapore, Montreal, Copenhagen, Washington, Santiago de Chile, Kuala Lumpur and Cape Town.

FIGO's next World Congress will take place in Rome, Italy, from 7-12 October 2012. For more information, visit the dedicated Congress website on [www.figo2012.org](http://www.figo2012.org)

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