



Report of European Conference on FASD 2016

12th-15th September – Royal Holloway, University of London

The Royal Holloway (University of London) campus was a beautiful setting for the fourth European Conference on FASD, and delegates enjoyed the warm September sunshine. FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) is the name given to the range of conditions which can result from alcohol consumed during pregnancy, and this was the first European conference on the subject to be held in the UK. The conference brought together academics, educators, non-governmental organisations and charities, legislators and politicians, lawyers and individuals involved in the criminal justice system as well as birth and adoptive families and individuals who themselves have FASD. The conference lasted two and a half days, and a one-day training event took place the following day, involving a total of 275 attendees. The conference covered a range of topics from basic science to interventions and prevention initiatives.

Speakers included such well-known names as Ira Chasnoff, who gave a 40-year perspective; Margaret Murray, who talked about thinking globally and acting locally; Lana Popova, who spoke on comorbidities; Barry Carpenter, who spoke on motivating learners; Piyadasa Kodituwakku, who spoke on the behavioral phenotype; and other speakers who brought new perspectives such as David Townend speaking on ethical issues and Gerjo Kok speaking on evidence-based approaches to prevention. The full program with abstracts can be viewed at http://www.eufasd.org/pdf/EUFASD_2016_program.pdf.

The impact of FASD was, however, most strongly brought home when three birth mothers and two young people with FASD bravely got up to share their own personal stories with the conference, and earned an extended standing ovations.



Lee Harvey-Heath giving a Plenary Lecture on his perspective as an adult living with FASD



A standing ovation for the speakers with FASD

Thanks to a grant from Alcohol Research UK, we were able to support three people with or affected by FASD to come to the conference. All were accompanied by their parents or caregivers, all with free entry to the conference. Using the support from Alcohol Research UK, we also awarded three scholarships to researchers from lower income countries in Europe. This allowed the delegates to hear about the FASD-related work that was going on in Moldova, Romania, and Russia. Scholarship winner Teodora Ciolompea (below), the lead of the largest drug dependency clinic in Romania, explained how she had obtained more knowledge and resources to help her diagnose FASD, and that she would be cascading the training in her organisation and more widely. She also explained how the scholarship had been vital to enable her to attend, as employers do not support staff to go to overseas conferences.



Scholarship award winner Teodora Ciolompea of Romania (left) with Penny Cook (right).



L to R: Chair of the EUFASD Alliance, Diane Black; Scholarship award winner Dumitru Siscanu from Moldova; and Penny Cook (University of Salford, member of local organising committee).

Dr Siscanu says, "I returned to my country with the most substantiated evidence to discuss with the most sceptical people, including academics from Moldova, on the need to restart the process of actions to reduce alcohol consumption during pregnancy... things that I learned at the conference made me understand how much we have to do to improve the situation in our country in this compartment... I am impressed by the interest shown by many conference participants towards Moldova and collaboration opportunities open in perspective as a result of discussions with experts from different countries." Dr Siscanu plans to create a team of specialists to develop a FASD action plan in his country.

The third scholarship winner was Dr Anait Marianian of Russia. She just finished her doctoral research on FASD, and is not yet employed. She was very grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference in London, and plans to continue her work to prevent FASD in Russia.



Salford team PhD student Alan Price (R) and Penny Cook (L) with Conference Chair Dr Raja Mukherjee (Surrey and Borders NHS Trust) with sponsors' logos.

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