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# WHO Infertility Initiatives

(informative special lecture given on request)

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Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research  
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# Brief historical review

- The World Health Assembly (WHO overarching governing body) in 1965 (and again in 1968) stated that every family should have the opportunity to receive information and advice regarding family planning decisions and infertility problems: and, furthermore these services should be part of basic health services. (WHA 18 and 21)

# Brief historical review

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- Upon recognizing the unmet needs of patients and providers for access to infertility diagnosis management and treatment, in 1972 HRP was established, and by 1975 the HRP “Task Force on the Diagnosis and Treatment of Infertility” was formed (active for approximately 15 years)

# WHO Infertility task force: Mandate

- Recognition of a public health problem/unmet need is not enough. Strategic assessment and intervention require
  - detailed analysis and systematic review providing evidence for infertility cause and linkages to previous, current or underlying disease,
  - proof of successful prevention and treatment modalities, and
  - development of evidence-based tools for training and interventions linked to appropriate diagnosis and management.

# WHO Infertility task force: Objectives

1. Introduction and validation of a tertiary care system for the investigation of the infertile couple; and,
2. Improve the diagnosis and management of infertility in order to begin to assess underlying causes of infertility.
  - Epidemiological studies were undertaken to assess primary and secondary infertility prevalence rates, the latter of which were found to be **twice** the rate of the former,
  - results of case control and prospective study trials providing some of the best evidence to date on the linkage of STI and infertility; and,
  - the initiation of the *WHO Manual for the investigation and diagnosis of the infertile couple*. (eventually published in 1993, revisions in 1997 and 2000) (and later *for the infertile male*. 2000)

# Medically Assisted Conception

- The **first** meeting was held at WHO in 1990, “Recent advances in medically assisted conception” and resulted in a WHO Technical Report Series published in 1992.
- In 1999, the WHA (52) requested that the WHO review recent medical developments in the field with respect to social and ethical implications. Therefore, a **second** meeting was held in 2001, and a report published in 2002, *Current practices and controversies in assisted reproduction* includes a glossary of definitions from the International Committee Monitoring ART (ICMART) and 87 recommendations.

# Initiatives in AFRO and EMRO

- *WHO Laboratory manual for the examination of human semen and sperm-cervical mucus interaction* originally intended for use in contraceptive research, has become the standard for semen analysis for infertility, and the basis for semenology workshops initially funded by HRP in sub-Saharan Africa.
- A regional workshop for AFRO and EMRO convened in Nairobi in 2001 to discuss infertility issues, resulted in recommendations for the development of tools for:
  - infertility services at the primary and secondary health care levels, and,
  - low cost ART protocols and ART services in light of bilateral tubal damage in secondary infertility (often as a result of STIs, poor obstetric care and **post-abortion complications**).

# Informing policy and decision-making

- The economies of health play a role in informed policy and decision-making.
- Tools for infertility intervention, prevention and treatment must be cost-effective.
- In most health care environments, specialization in the field of infertility is linked to high profit – both commercially-driven companies as well as health care providers themselves.



# Infertility, 2008 Activities

- In 2008, a **third** international meeting on infertility was held at WHO on “Assisted reproductive technologies, Common terminology and management in low-resource settings.”
  - ICMART, the International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) and the Low Cost IVF Foundation (LCIVFF) jointly supported and actively assisted WHO.
  - Low cost alternatives and mechanisms to bring medically assisted reproduction to low resource settings were discussed.

# Infertility, 2008 Activities

## Meeting on infertility algorithms and WHO infertility tools

- A smaller workshop was held to discuss infertility and the primary health care initiative.
- Discussion and review took place concerning existing WHO and other manuals and tools in infertility as well as the Four Cornerstones for Family Planning.
- Recommendations for the generation of revised guidance were made to WHO.

*“Infertility care, maternal care and peri-natal care, as well as care for infants and children, should be part of a continuum of maternal and family health”*

# Infertility meeting outcome: Glossary and recommendations

- The original 2001 glossary of infertility terminology was revised, and significantly expanded to include laboratory and intervention outcome terminology. Consensus was reached after 2 days of debate and discussion.
- After 2 more days of presentation and discussion, recommendations were generated that concentrated on concrete ways to find solutions to generate access to assisted reproductive interventions in low-resource settings.
  - Different models for low cost alternatives
  - Document prevention, prevalence and burden of disease
  - Education
  - Governments, public policy and advocacy
  - Clinical data management and governance
  - WHO leadership needs

# Current WHO infertility activities

- Integration of infertility into Primary Health Care – development of template for guidance (initiated within WHO, to be field tested)

## COMPANION LECTURE by Dr Lisa Feldman

- Integration of infertility into Primary Health Care – development of primary and secondary care tools (small expert group) including revision of WHO Manuals for infertility (male and female), algorithms for various providers, various training and clinic tools for development
- Infertility Glossary Publication
- WHO Meeting Report (Infertility working Group)
- Working group with GBD team on 'infertility envelope' (DHS data)
- Working group with ICD11 TAG (Infertility societies)
- Expert meeting on ethics to address donor gametes, surrogacy, adoption, methods of ART

Thank you