

Report on Istanbul meeting – Rossella Bartolucci, Italy

The 10th international meeting of iCSi – International Consumer Support for Infertility - , the network of infertile patients' organizations, took place in Istanbul on February the 21st and 22nd , at the Ritz Carlton Hotel.

Leaders of infertile patients associations from all over the world met there and, each bringing their own views and experiences from his/her country, discussed together the theme “Transforming sacred cows: managing taboos and barriers”, explaining to each other the difficulties and taboos about infertility and Assisted Reproduction Techniques (ART) in their home country and how they manage them.

Estela Chardon, chair of Concebir, the Argentinian top organization for people suffering fertility problems, introduced the meeting underlining the importance of the iCSi international exchange, that enables every organization from every country to get the most updated information about reproductive medicine in the world and about any social and legal item linked to infertility.

It was extremely interesting to hear Sibel Tuzcu, leader of the most important Turkish infertility association CIDER and perfect local organizer of this meeting, talking about Turkish taboos around infertility, taboos linked to religion: “donor ART is forbidden because, according to our religion is a sin like to perform adultery and interrupting the blood line” Sibel stated.

From religious taboo to the “ultimate taboo, the one that no infertile couple wants to think about: the childless family”, says Sandra Dill, Chair of AccessAustralia and iCSi international. Sandra, led us through different literature and cultures to discover how, each country sees the childless condition; going from Uganda, where the childless woman loses her place in the family, reaching Japan where sometimes, to potential grandparents, the birth of grandchildren is more important than the happiness of their own – maybe infertile – children.

Again to a religious taboo that strongly influences politics and law: that was the theme of the Italian case, presented by Rossella

Bartolucci, chair of Sos Infertilità – a non profit organization from Italy, told us about the cultural roots and the history of Italian Law 40/2004 on ART, Rossella detailed the ways through which her association tries to change the law and the mentality, from info campaigns to legal claims.

David Rawlings, vice-chair of AccessAustralia and author of the book “Male infertility: swimming upstream” is a strong and original voice in representation of all those men who suffer of reproductive problems but, during treatments, stay always “behind” their female partners; David spoke about the lack of support to infertile men. “All is about her”, he complained and he reported the typical questions a man undergoing infertility treatments asks himself, such as: “how can I help her feel better?”, “Should I be strong or vulnerable?”.

The next session was moderated by Ofra Balaban, from Israel.

Dr Petra Thorn, Counsellor and Social Worker from Germany, in her presentation “Cross Border Reproductive Care: creating families or creating problems?” surveyed the phenomenon of “travelling couples” and of the ongoing researches about it:

- ESHRE, taskforce for Cross Border Reproductive Care. Pilot study.
- Transrep, in Great Britain.
- International Infertility Counselling Survey.

Dr. Thorn stated that couples not only cross geographical borders, but even geopolitical, ethnic, time, knowledge ones, when travelling across one country, when searching for donor gametes, when fighting against menopause, when accepting anonymity of donor.

As a counselor she highlighted the need to be aware of “ meanings of social and biological parenthood, couple and family dynamics, meaning and roles of donors, implications of donors’ anonymity.

From generic “crossing the border couples” to the couples travelling in search for a surrogate. Laure Camborieux, Chair of Association Maia, France, tells us about “Surrogate motherhood: for the worst...and the best”.

Conditions leading to a surrogacy, that means that a woman will carry a child who will be raised by another couple, are:

- No uterus
- Uterus unable to perform the pregnancy
- Medical condition forbidding pregnancy

Surrogacy, around the world is or completely illegal or without any legal framework or legal.

Dr Camborieux recommended that couples be aware of the short and long term consequences for the surrogate and the family and to be well informed about all the aspects, medical, legal, psychological, prior to undergoing surrogacy.

She also stated that “surrogacy can be ethical, under precise circumstances” and it should be inserted in a legal framework in every country.

Rita Sembuya, from Uganda reported the creation, in her country, thanks to her organization, of a medical organization, the Fertility Society of Uganda. The title of her presentation is: “Patient initiated medical professional society. Case study: Uganda”. Through Ms Sembuya we learned a lot about infertile patients’ situation in developing countries, where they suffer from strong cultural taboos and lack of adequate medical structures.

In conclusion of the meeting, discussion goes on in order to identify and develop key transforming strategies to help each country to increase the quality of ART and the satisfaction of patients.