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**“One Passion, One Vision and One World”**

**Reflections on the 9<sup>th</sup> Council of International Neonatal Nurses Conference (COINN) 2016**

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This report presents our reflections and feedback of the 9<sup>th</sup> Council of International Neonatal Nurses (COINN) conference 2016 that took place at the Westin hotel, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from August 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> 2016. This sophisticated venue overlooking a beautiful harbour captured the welcoming atmosphere and positivity that was to embrace the conference experience for the 5 day duration of ‘COINN 2016’. As you read this short article which describes the highlights and key messages from the conference, we invite the readers to hear the actual words from some of the first-time participants who stated that they will place the next ‘COINN 2019’ on their calendar with high anticipation.

The Canadian Association of Neonatal Nurses (CANN) welcomed us with open arms. Over 400 neonatal nursing delegates from approximately twenty countries met for this triannual event. Since our last COINN conference in Belfast 2013, Northern Ireland, our CANN colleagues tirelessly worked to create an unforgettable experience where neonatal nurses from all over the world could gather, mingle, network, learn, explore, nurture, challenge, stimulate, collaborate and more. The event offered delegates the opportunities for sharing their accomplishments as well as challenges. It was a first class experience.



## Conference highlights

The pre-conference sessions were held on August 13<sup>th</sup>, prior to the opening of the COINN 2016. The two valuable workshops that were organised comprised a research workshop and another that introduced the participants to the opportunity for volunteering in areas of global health.

The official opening session the following day, gave us the sound of dramatic bagpipes echoing throughout the hall as pipers led a line of delegates carrying their national flags representing the many countries attending the conference in Vancouver. The multi-colour flags from around the world stood proudly behind the podium throughout the remainder of the conference reminding us daily, how significant it was that we were there and of the important central theme: “One Passion, One Vision and One World”. Dr. Karen New, the COINN president and Karen Lasby, the CANN president both welcomed us all to the venue and to the full programme ahead.

This year was the third time that Save the Children’s “Saving Newborn Lives Program” supported the International Neonatal Nursing Excellence Awards with COINN. This award is designed to recognize nurse leaders who are making a difference in lives of newborns in low to mid resource regions of our globe. It was with great anticipation that we awaited the announcement and presentation of the winners on the morning of day three. This year’s two honoured recipients were Nguyen Thi Minh Hong of Viet Nam and Adeyemo Abass Kola of Nigeria, chosen from nominees representing more than fourteen countries. The Heathy Newborn Network website which is an initiative of the ‘Saving Newborn Lives’ Program introduced each recipient through a beautifully created slide show, available on open access for anyone to view (Save the Children Federation, 2016). This award ceremony was a strong reminder to every neonatal nurse that it is the workforce that makes the difference to improving the lives and outcomes of sick, small, vulnerable neonates and their families.

Global health workforce issues in fact was the subject of the first keynote speaker. Strong words of encouragement for nurses to engage with policy makers and to understand the global policies came from the president of the International Council of Nurses, Dr. Judith Shamian. In her session titled, “Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health” (Shamian, 2016), she challenged the audience by asking, “Who has contacted the regional representative in the last 6 months for the cause of Newborn related issues?” and “ Who are familiar with United Nations’ Sustainable Developmental Goals (United Nations, 2016 a) that world leaders adopted in 2015 and the goals’ relevance to you? “. At a glance, the relevance to neonatal nursing may not be clearly visible, however, significant accomplishments were achieved as a result of the Millennium Development Goals

#4 which put forth specific efforts leading to reduction of newborn deaths.(United Nations 2016 b) We must sustain this momentum. Now, the Sustainable Development Goal #3 defines many targets, but specific ones clearly indicate their relevance to everyone who attended 'COINN 2016'. These are outlined as follows:

- *'By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births*
- *By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being*
- *Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol'* (United Nations 2016 b).

No unified effort can be possible, nor positive outcomes achieved without a workforce that is specifically trained and supported by sound evidence-based neonatal knowledge, deployed strategically in positions of education, traineeship, providing direct care or impacting policy. Neonatal nurses are highly qualified, valuable professionals who can and should play an integral role in the future endeavor of improving neonatal outcomes along with their families. Supporting COINN's efforts by becoming a COINN member, you have the opportunity to be informed of global contributions that this organisation continues to make in partnership with others.

This global perspective set the scene for the remainder of the three days. Other general sessions focused on vitally important issues that were relevant for us all, wherever we were from. The conference offered us reputable, eloquent keynote speakers who presented on a wide range of highly valuable and thought provoking topics each day. These included: 'trauma informed' care, nurturing for early feeding, the research basis and rationale for implementing an exclusive human milk diet, pain management, family integrated approaches to care, partnership with parents, issues around antibiotic use and brain development. Two expert-led general session panels focused on the issues around putting neonatal knowledge into practice and addressing global challenges, both which added to the critically relevant content of the conference. Furthermore, breakfast symposiums also contributed to the learning content which put the spotlight on the practical aspects of providing a 100% human milk diet and the importance of family integrated care in relation to the reduction of respiratory syncytial virus.

Due to this variety of information shared by highly accomplished experts in the field, many of us felt that we learnt significant additional information and tools to equip us further as we returned to our tasks back home. The wealth and the breadth of these topics offered by world experts provided something for every delegate no matter which country, how experienced, or which area of nursing she or he was personally engaged in currently.

In relation to the concurrent sessions and poster presentations, there were a rich and interesting variety, categorized by themes. The sheer number means it is not possible to mention each and every one here. A total of 85 concurrent sessions and 64 poster presentations offered valuable opportunities for delegates to highlight and share their research and education accomplishments, quality improvement efforts, results of systematic reviews or uniquely regional strategies or challenges and more. Proud presenters were seen throughout the poster exhibit hall or in oral session rooms who shared their work often generating robust discussions and further building a network of like-minded professionals. Presentations on topics such as, Transport difficulties in Brazil, strategies for developing competence in a Danish NICU, history of and future goals for the Japanese Academy of Neonatal Nurses, newborn safety initiatives in New Zealand and the challenges of palliative care in neonatal nurses in Northern Ireland, were just a selection of the diverse range of topics presented as concurrent sessions at 'COINN 2016'. All oral and poster presentations however, in some way enriched the conference content offering increasing awareness among the delegates of similar or contrasting challenges that invited collaboration both at the conference but also beyond.

Social highlights included the opening reception in the exhibit hall and the Celebration Dinner which took place the evening before the last day. At the opening night, many chose to wear a red and white theme in honour of the Canadian National Flag and to celebrate the Canadian team's remarkable accomplishment in bringing us together. A variety of national costumes added elegance to the celebratory atmosphere. The celebration dinner event was filled with music reminiscing of the 60's era inviting nearly everyone to the dance floor. The theme was fitting as it enabled reflection back to the era when Neonatal Intensive Care was just beginning to be recognized as a specialty deserving of equally specialized training programmes.

### **The Words from the First Time Participants**

Many first-time attendees left Vancouver with renewed zeal and commitment for the future. Several voices shared their thoughts with their permission. The first author was privileged to hear from the first-time delegates from Japan, who submitted the following words for this publication.

- *'Attending COINN 2016 has given me the opportunity to share my passion about the area of my interest and expertise. This experience gave me the courage to move forward with my current efforts. I also gained a renewed appreciation for the vulnerability of this unique population who deserves enhanced sensitivities in ethical considerations'.*
- *'Neonatal Nursing is Bigger than I ever knew and the COINN experience has shown me that Neonatal Professionals are needed not only within the walls of NICU, but in a greater context to meet the health needs of the families'.*
- *'Attending COINN afforded me a rare networking opportunities with neonatal experts from my own country/region as well with those from other parts of the world. It is truly invigorating'.*
- *'The sheer number of neonatal nurses united with one passion infused me with energy to move forward'.*
- *'COINN provided a window to the outside world but also provided an excellent moment for me to look into my own region through the outside scope. Being a part of COINN stirred something new in me that I recognize the potential opportunities for future networking and collaboration'.*
- *'Communication barriers may stand in the way for some participants for sure. Being immersed in the COINN culture and to be surrounded by passionately committed and highly engaged professionals from all areas of the world, whether they are clinicians, researchers, students, or educators taught me something that only a lived-experience can teach me'.*
- *'Seeing neonatal colleagues in the world in various capacities endeavoring to meet the needs of the babies through families made me cognizant of how I should increase partnership with families'.*
- *'I was impressed with many neonatal professionals who obviously took a pride in their commitment and continue to find their role fulfilling while improving the lives of babies and their families through their work'.*
- *'Attending COINN gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own practice, analyze what is really needed or important and to share what I know well with others'.*
- *'I would like to build upon my experience of COINN2016 and prepare for the next COINN. I am bringing back some of my colleagues with me next time so they would gain this global perspective'.*



### Passing the COINN Torch

It was apt that the conference finished with another key global theme. During the closing session, Dr. Anthony Costello, the Director of Department of Maternal Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health at World Health Organization spoke about the global impact that neonatal nursing continues to have for maternal and newborn health (Costello and Kenner, 2016). Being reminded by a significant figure within WHO leadership that we are valued as their partner in the future development of strategies to address the needs is important to share with those who did not hear Dr. Costello's closing remarks.

After Dr. Costello's address, Dr. Carole Kenner, the Executive Director of COINN responded with a strong and moving take-home message to the delegates to step up and unite in partnership with other organizations and colleagues. This is so that, as a collective force, neonatal nursing can continue to capture opportunities to make a difference globally. Dr. Kenner emphasized with passion that neonatal nurses must have a voice and that it is vital to 'be at the table' of any global decision-making, policy development or initiative in order to make a difference.

The analogy of the term 'passing the torch' was also fitting, since this conference coincided with the Olympic Games in Rio, Brazil. As we reluctantly concluded 'COINN 2016', the CANN president passed the torch with all our hearts' anticipation to the New Zealand Nurses Organization (NZNO). NZNO had already begun making their plans to ensure another unforgettable COINN conference, this time graced with the family theme. Now we have a newly ignited motivation to continue our work, wherever we are and not forgetting the essential theme: *One Passion, One Vision and One World.*

## Closing remarks

Being at 'COINN 2016' really was an uplifting and amazing experience to remember. The passion and vision we embraced in Vancouver at 'COINN 2016' will refine us as we continue to inquire, discover, collaborate and educate. We must all be committed to enrich our practice setting and ensure an enhanced nurturing environment is a reality for the neonates in our care, their families and our colleagues alike.

It is essential now moving forward that we are collective in our aims in order to have a voice and to make a difference as highlighted throughout this paper. The authors encourage you to join your own national neonatal nurses association since, in the words of the UK Neonatal Nurses Association (NNA) outlined on their website ( <http://www.nna.org.uk> )..... *The greater the number, the louder the voice. Make a difference. Be heard.* You can further contribute to such a voice globally by also joining COINN, either through your own national association or by visiting their website for an individual membership ( <http://coinnurses.org> ). Encouraging your country's national neonatal or nursing organisations to consider partnering with COINN would be encouraged.

Finally, we ask you to note a date in your diary for May 2019. Meet us in Auckland, New Zealand on May 5-8, 2019 for the 10<sup>th</sup> COINN International conference 2019, Enriched Family – Enhanced Care! Visit the website regularly over the next 2 years for more information and sign up for their mailing list by visiting the following site ( <http://www.coinn2019.com> ). We look forward to seeing you there so we can continue our shared interest in enhancing the care of our neonates and their families as part of a global network.

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