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The importance of being healthy

GEETA PADMANABHAN



THE HINDUHELP AT HAND Gita Arjun and Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran. Photo: V. Ganesan.

Multi-faceted Sabaratnam Arulkumaran says a women-centric, integrated health policy is much needed

'Progress', a conference on practical obstetrics and gynaecology has, since 1993, been bringing together obstetricians from all over the country. This year's edition, on till July 31 at Anna Centenary Library Auditorium, focusses on knowledge dissemination and perpetuation of good clinical practices for professionals in this field.

The first day was presided by Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, KBE, president-elect of the International Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, professor and head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, St George's University of London, editor-in-chief of Best Practice and Research in Clinical Obstetrics and Gynaecology, author of several professional books, and honorary fellow / member of a host of Obstetrics and Gynaecology colleges and societies across longitudes.

An advocate of women's health rights, Sabaratnam gathers and disseminates best practices in clinical childbirth, and promotes healthcare policies for women.

The 3rd edition of “Management of Labour”, a book for practising obstetricians that he and Gita Arjun have edited jointly, is being released during the conference.

Dual realities

Sir Sabaratnam reads the realities of women's health in India in two chapters — the stark ones in rural, traditional societies, and the sometimes self-made ones the urban, new-millennium women confront.

“Maternal and neonatal deaths are high in India, especially in women below the poverty line,” he says, putting it down to inadequate or inaccessible health facilities, lack of skilled birth attendants, early marriage and child bearing, lack of contraception to space family, poverty, poor nutrition and unhygienic living conditions.

In the cities, “unhealthy workplace habits and the double-shift of running a home and office compromise fetal growth in a woman already ill-nourished. Urban women face issues of environmental pollution, stress of working environment and lack of finances to improve nutrition and health”.

Pressing issues

Gynaecologists today are fighting obesity, diabetes, late motherhood, indiscriminate IVF practices such as multiple embryo transfer that result in premature babies and multiple pregnancies, he adds.

Maternity healthcare has to be planned well to reach all areas, he says. Health facilities need to be “accessible, available, acceptable and affordable”. His prescription to reduce maternal mortality is a combination of better nutrition, spacing of family, skilled attendance at birth, and, of course, access to good clinics. Sir Sabaratnam would like a women-centric, integrated health policy that covers the needs of a girl child, the adolescent and the woman at reproductive and old age. “If a teenager goes for emergency contraception, she may get the prescription for the pills, but does not get advice on long-term contraception, the need to exclude pregnancy, and an examination to exclude sexually-transmitted infection,” he says, as example.

He is hopeful, though. Better practices should improve women's chances of safe childbirth, he believes. “Tamil Nadu has reduced maternal mortality by instituting hospital deliveries for all.”

FOR A SAFE PREGNANCY, DELIVERY

- * Better nutrition, exercise and hygiene from young age
- * Access to suitable contraception to space the family
- * Opportunities to have antenatal care and skilled birth attendance at delivery
- * Screening for major illness such as cervical and breast cancer
- * Good post-natal care, in case of complications relating to the uterus
- * Adopting a healthy lifestyle

Keywords: [healthy life](#), [Sabaratnam Arulkumaran](#), [nutrition](#)