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The 1st Perinatal Mental Health Conference, in Chicago, IL, was a gathering of some of the most accomplished minds in maternal mental health. Regardless of the topic, one thing was certain- everyone in attendance was committed to discussing ways to provide the best care for every woman during the perinatal period.

The workshop “If You Build It, They Will Come: Constructing a Perinatal Psychiatry Curriculum,” included presentations from current women’s mental health programs across the country that currently offer fellowships or specialty training with a focus in perinatal health. Additionally, a challenging clinical case was offered as a way to identify the special needs of women during childbearing in order to design a training curriculum. Finally, a lively discussion ensued on the potential future directions of designing a curriculum to help better train future perinatal mental health specialists.

In addition to maternal health, there was also a spotlight on the outcomes of infants of women with mental health concerns. There were several very interesting presentations about the effects of mental illness and treatment on the fetus and developing child. One such presentation highlighted the differences between and identification of minor and major malformations. This presentation explained how we can use these malformations to understand when the insult occurred and how it relates to the developing fetal brain. Did you know that hair whorls can tell us about a baby's brain development? What a fascinating concept! Another presentation discussed how we can creatively measure the effects of stress and anxiety on the developing fetus and infant- which is no easy task with a non-verbal patient.

Another focus of the conference was on treatment and prevention of psychosis in pregnant and post-partum women. This raised a very interesting discussion on standard of care for such patients in the US versus Europe. In addition to psychotropic treatments, the conference highlighted therapeutic interventions including newly proposed web-based CBT and phone-based therapy techniques for those patients who are tech savvy or who have limited access to care.

Another interesting topic covered during the conference was substance abuse disorders in pregnancy and how to treat them. This paired nicely with a presentation and discussion of ethical and legal issues in treating pregnant women, which is an inevitable issue that every health care provider needs to consider when treating women of childbearing age.

Lastly, there were plenty of intriguing and innovative poster presentations by many of the attendees who displayed their own research projects. Attendees included pediatricians, obstetricians/gynecologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, residents, and research aids. All in all, a vast array of information was presented leading to a lot of collaboration and productive interdisciplinary discussions from specialists all over the world!

