

Seventh International Conference on Urban Health “Knowledge Integration—Successful Interventions in Urban Health” Vancouver, BC, Canada, October 29–31, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

It was a pleasure to host the Seventh International Conference on Urban Health (ICUH) at the Westin Bayshore Resort and Marina in Vancouver, British Columbia, from October 29 to 31, 2008. We were proud to build on the success of previous official meetings of the International Society for Urban Health (www.isuh.org), which were most recently held in Baltimore, Amsterdam, and Toronto. The theme, “Knowledge Integration—Successful Interventions in Urban Health,” was chosen to showcase action-oriented projects and best practices, and we received an overwhelming response with over 550 abstract submissions. The scientific review committee selected 180 for oral presentation and over 150 for poster presentation in a broad range of urban health issues spanning child and adolescent health, best practices in meeting urban health challenges, and the influence of the physical and social environments on urban health. We had 526 conference registrants, and 114 (22%) were from low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). We were grateful to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the WHO Kobe Centre for providing 10 scholarships to the LMIC scholars with the highest-rated abstracts to attend the meeting. Conference participants shared many lessons to learn during the oral/poster abstract sessions, the concurrent workshop, and panel sessions. All oral and poster abstracts presented at the conference can be found in the following pages of this issue of the *Journal of Urban Health*.

We also organized preconference workshops that were intended to build skills and provide tools for delegates to respond to the challenges faced in their communities. The topics ranged from promoting healthy urban environments through environmental justice, urban health and sustainability, urban health indicators, city-to-city learning and intersectoral partnerships, and media literacy and advocacy as it relates to healthier public policy. We had exemplary internationally renowned, plenary speakers who embodied the interdisciplinarity of urban health; they provided different perspectives and were able to draw threads from previous speaker presentations and integrate them into their own talks effortlessly. It was also an honor to present Dr. Trevor Hancock with the ISUH Humanitarian Award for his lifetime of work in urban health and healthy public policy.

As Past-President of the International Society of Urban Health (ISUH), I believe the conference has served as an opportunity to convene scholars and practitioners

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from various disciplines in order to respond proactively to the various societal and global movements that are currently occurring:

- Rapid urbanization as two thirds of the world's population will be living in cities by 2030, with the largest increase occurring in LMIC.
- Globalization with its increasing worldwide integration of markets for goods, services, and capital, as well as the movement of people.
- Climate change and the need for sustainable cities—we must have the ability to meet the needs of today's people and environment without compromising that of subsequent generations. This is incredibly relevant to all of us, and those living in LMIC are the most vulnerable to the effects of global warming.
- The open access movement—we need to create the infrastructure and information technology to freely access important health and other scholarly information so health and public policy decisions are made using all of the best evidence available.

These movements lay the context for how our cities' physical and social environments are shaped, and we must better understand and integrate a systems approach with intersectoral partnerships to address the challenges ahead in urban health.

ICUH 2008 facilitated collaborations with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, WHO Kobe Centre, Centre for Global Development, and the Rockefeller Foundation to align our visions and begin to work together in the future. Specifically, we provided a venue for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to convene the leaders in reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and child health as it pertains to urban settings in low-income countries. They are committed to working with the ISUH to support the upcoming meeting in Nairobi, Kenya (<http://www.icuh2009.org>). They will support the attendance of LMIC scholars and decision makers for maximal impact. The WHO Kobe Centre convened a Roundtable to discuss the priority area and action item report they will be releasing in 2010 as part of the WHO Campaign on Urbanization and Health. The Centre for Global Development is now focusing on urban health in LMIC and convened a session with interdisciplinary urban health scholars to discuss the direction of their work. Two themes they may pursue based on this meeting are: 1) the models for health service delivery, governance, and accountability as the responsibility for administration of these services devolves to local municipalities; 2) making the case for urban investment given the rapid rise of informal settlements and the evidence that their health outcomes are worse than those living in rural areas, thereby losing the "urban advantage."

With these partnerships, ISUH will continue to strive to produce a high-quality program and provide opportunities to build productive interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and community partnerships so that we can work together to improve urban health both at home and globally. I am most grateful for the opportunity to host ICUH 2008 and I am looking forward to attending ICUH 2009, which will be hosted by the African Population and Health Research Centre, October 19–23, 2009. This will be the first time our meeting is held outside of North America and Europe, and it promises to be an exceptional congress. I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,
Anita Palepu