

Warning of humanitarian crisis over fertility rates in advance of 2021 ASPIRE Congress

The scientific chairman of the 10th Congress of the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction (ASPIRE), starting on Friday, has issued a stark warning that plummeting fertility rates in the Asia Pacific region have reached crisis levels with the prospect of dire social and economic circumstances.

Professor Tzeng Chii-Ruey, an eminent specialist in reproductive medicine based at Taipei Fertility Centre in Taiwan, said the crisis in the region, home to 60 per cent of the world's population, had become a humanitarian issue.

The ASPIRE 2021 congress, originally scheduled to be held in the Philippines, is being presented in on-line format – <https://aspire2021.cme-congresses.com> – to delegates in more than 100 countries because of ongoing concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor Tzeng said data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank highlighted the continuing downward trend in fertility rates in the Asia Pacific region.

“COVID-19 has contributed a further blow to the fertility crisis and the bleak prospects in population decline,” he said.

“How we should face social and economic challenges of the fertility crisis is not a question of national security. It is, in fact, a humanitarian issue that needs the cooperation of the international community.”

Professor Tzeng said the ASPIRE Congress, recognised as the most influential meeting on human fertility in the Asia Pacific region, would engage scientists, embryologists, clinicians, nurses and counsellors around the world to address latest developments in reproductive medicine.

The ASPIRE Congress will help shape the future of assisted reproduction in the region and globally as more than 100 internationally renowned speakers share knowledge about new research findings and clinical outcomes.

“We will also be exchanging knowledge from the ASPIRE Congress with other world bodies including the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine,” he added.

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Members of the Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand will also be prominent among participants in the virtual congress to be held over two weekends from 30 April to 9 May.

Professor Tzeng said participants were dedicated to advancing reproductive science and medicine while improving access to and quality of services for people striving to have children.

The World Health Organisation has forecast that infertility will become the third most serious condition after cancer and cardiovascular diseases in the 21st century.

Globally, the average population replacement rate is 2.1 births per woman – the minimum rate considered necessary to maintain population numbers. Japan's fertility rate continues to hover at about 1.4 with Korea dropping to 0.9 according to latest figures, while China has fallen to about 1.6.

“Some recent reports indicate newborn registration rates in China and Japan have dropped by 15 per cent and 3 per cent respectively,” Professor Tzeng said.

“While some countries in our region, including India and Indonesia, have fertility rates aligned with the global average, a declining pattern is becoming obvious.”

Infertility affects millions of people of reproductive age worldwide. There are many complex factors contributing to falling fertility levels including couples marrying later in life limiting their ability to reproduce, pressures of growing urbanisation, work-related stress and environmental conditions.

Professor Tzeng said some Asian Pacific countries, including Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, provided public funding to support access to and affordability of fertility treatment to help people achieve their dream of parenthood. “Regrettably, such public health funding policies are not seen in many economically developing countries or regions,” he added.

Key issues to be addressed at the ASPIRE 2021 Congress include:

- the impact of COVID 19 on the reproductive system;
- male reproductive health;
- the next generation of infertile patients;
- health of offspring from assisted reproductive technologies;
- fertility preservation – social and medical;
- advances in reproductive genetics;
- reducing the financial burden of assisted reproduction;
- new global guidelines on polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS); and
- the origins of endometriosis.

For further information, go to the Congress website <https://aspire2021.cme-congresses.com>

INTERVIEW

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