

Addiction in America & Hong Kong: Highlights from the First Asia Pacific Conference on Addiction

By Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, NAADAC Executive Director

Last night I flew in from Hong Kong after having spent the better part of a week with NAADAC's Asia Pacific Association for Addiction Professionals (APAAP) and the Asia Pacific Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (APCCAP) at the First Asia Pacific Conference of Addiction Professionals, organized by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, Integrated Centre on Addiction Prevention and Treatment, and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The APAAP is an international NAADAC affiliate that represents addiction professionals in Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, and Macau SAR, and provides trainings as a NAADAC Approved Education Provider in the Asia Pacific region. The APCCAP serves as a certifying body for the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCC AP) and offers NCAC I, NCAC II, and MAC Certification exams to those that qualify.

Conference Highlights

During the presentation "The Syndrome Model of Addiction," Dr. Howard Shaffer and Dr. Heather Gray from Harvard Medical School discussed the importance of realizing that most people do not become addicted, most people do not need treatment to change, most treatments work about the same as each other, and some treatments do not work well for everyone. They also discussed the conceptual errors on which many treatments focus, including the concept that addiction resides as a latent property, such as in a drug, and focusing on addiction rather than recovery. I encourage you to read "Toward a Syndrome Model of Addiction: Multiple Expressions, Common Etiology" from *Harvard Rev Psychiatry*, Volume 12, Number 6, pages 367-374 to learn more.

Dr. Delaney Ruston from Stoney Brook University School of Medicine showed her video on "Screenagers: Growing Up in the Digital Age" and discussed the implications of this expression of addiction being added to the addictions we are seeing across the globe. Dr. Thomas Chung from the Faculty of Medicine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong presented on "Supporting Kids and Teens in the Digital Age" and provided the following SAFE ACTS tips: (S) Show the right attitude by practicing what you preach; (A) Aware of the benefits and risks to digital use; (F) Facilitate a balanced life style including outside activities; (E) Empower children to face the challenge. (A) Agree on rules on time and types of digital use together; (C) Communicate openly and honestly; (T) Trust and respect your child; (S) Seek help when needed. We can see these tips are transferrable to other addictions and can be used in creating healthy family systems.

Dr. Martin Kafka from Harvard Medical School spoke on "The Internet and Sexual Addiction: A Guide for Clinicians and Psychopharmacologists," focusing on the shared psychosocial antecedents of these disorders,

including psychiatric depression, trauma, impulsivity, delinquency, lack of social skills, and poverty. Dr. Kafka echoed the other presenters, who consistently placed the emphasis on the recovery of the person using multidimensional treatments.

Representatives from the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals discussed the history of their organization and their ongoing clinical research projects. The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals is a system that is over 150 years old and has over 125 clinics and hospitals across Hong Kong. The ongoing research areas include family based interventions for SUD in community based settings, single session therapies with multiple clinicians facilitating, art therapy for families with addictive parents, effectiveness of short-term residential treatment for clients with diverse addictive behaviors, and working with pregnant women with drug use disorders in residential settings.

It was an honor to be the closing plenary speaker and speak about my book, *Rein in Your Brain: from Impulsivity to Thoughtful Living in Recovery*. I discussed the ten tips to building regulation in the brain and working through the disagreements, trauma and misunderstandings of that happen in our lives in recovery: (1) Stand Still in the Moment; (2) Do Not Assume Intent; (3) Be an Archeologist – Dig Deeper into the Conflict/Hurt; (4) Cultivate Confusion; (5) Understand the Paradox of Control; (6) Dismantle the Wall of Misunderstanding; (7) Create a Blameless Relationship with Yourself; (8) Avoid Premature Forgiveness; (9) Put Down Your Dukes; and (10) Take Responsibility for Self-Fulfilling Prophecies.

Over the course of my week in Hong Kong, I was impressed by and appreciative of the hard work being done by APAAP, APCCAP, the many additional professionals I met at the conference, and the clinicians and researchers in the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. Witnessing the interactions and sharing of ideas between the Americans and our colleagues in Asia, I was reminded that we are facing the same battles but also making the same strides in research and working with the same diligence and passion to develop effective treatments for those living with substance use disorders. Together, we are making a difference! Cynthia



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, is the Executive Director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and has worked as an addiction professional for over 35 years. She has been a trainer in Domestic Violence/Anger Management and Conflict Resolution for over 25 years as well as an international, national and state trainer in a variety of topics. Moreno Tuohy is also a curriculum writer in addiction screening and evaluation, counseling methods, conflict resolution, co-occurring disorders and medicated assisted treatment and recovery, and has written articles published in national and other trade magazines. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in

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