



STI Global Update

Newsletter of the International Union against Sexually Transmitted Infections

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President's Letter



Tribute to Dr Julius 'Julie' Schachter

It was with great sadness that we heard that a member of our Executive Committee (EXCO), Dr Julius 'Julie' Schachter, succumbed to COVID-19 on 20th December 2020. When I joined the World Executive Committee in 2007, Julie was an established Senior Counsellor. He had been a member of the EXCO since being President of the ASTDA, from 1996 to 2002, when he automatically became the Chair of IUSTI-North America.



Dr Julius 'Julie' Schachter

He contributed a great deal to IUSTI over many years and was a world leader in chlamydia research. A number of obituaries have already been published. This obituary was in the New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/obituaries/dr->

[julius-schachter-dead-covid.html](#) and Max Chernesky has written a tribute which will be published in Sexually Transmitted Diseases journal shortly.



Julie, Angelika Stary, Hunter Handsfield, Sevgi Aral, Charlotte Gaydos and Tom Quinn at the IUSTI-Europe Congress, Milan, 2008

As an IUSTI tribute to him, I have asked three of our Executive Committee members, who have known him well for many years, to write a small paragraph each about his contributions to STI research and care.

From Charlotte Gaydos:

The IUSTI family was saddened to learn that Julius "Julie" Schachter passed away on December 20, 2020. He had been in the ICU for many weeks in San Francisco and finally succumbed to the horrible CoVID-19. We are in disbelief and our eyes are flooded with tears. He was of course a world-renowned scientist in the trachoma and chlamydia field and made many important contributions to science. I used to refer to him as "Mr. Chlamydia". He was most of all, my friend. He has always been a supporter of IUSTI and served for many years on the Executive Committee and as a Senior Counsellor, and always made significant contributions.

Many have attempted to express what he meant to us as a teacher, mentor, collaborator, and friend. "Julie had a heart of gold and supported many of us along the way." "He wanted us all to succeed." "Julie was irascible and unique- I enjoyed working with him and the Chlamydia world is poorer now without him." "Julie was an institution." "Julie with Chan Dawson, along with Joe Cook who saw the potential of our trachoma research back in the 1980s, were my inspiration as I started to work on trachoma and I loved those Chlamydia World Cup meetings he set up." "Science just lost a giant." "He was always a lovely bloke to me – listening to what I had to say before there was any reason for anyone to think I had a view worth listening to." "I am devastated." "Julie has been a great mentor to all of us - He did a lot for chlamydia research. I will

miss him deeply". "He was such a leader of the chlamydia field, a great colleague to all us, and a friend at all times. He will be so missed." "It is so hard to accept when someone so much larger than life passes away. Unbelievable really." "Today the world lost a gentle GIANT and Microbiology lost a tremendous scholar and great scientist." "Julie influenced the careers of many of us. He was a friend. May he rest in peace."



Julie with Charlotte Gaydos

Julie worked with other scientists to establish the International Symposium on Human Chlamydial Infections in the 1960s. This meeting has been every 4 years, coinciding with The World Cup. Scientists gathered and presented new chlamydia science and listened to Julie summarize our accomplishments and failures, and develop a path forward. The last one was the 14th ISHCI held in 2018 in Woudschoten, Zeist, Netherlands.

Julie's last quote to our scientific Community: "Fellow attendees at ISHCI "

"While it has only been about ten months since the last ISHCI meeting in Woudschoten, it is time to think about the next meeting, projected for June 2022. These meetings take a long time for planning and fundraising. The venue for the next meeting has not been chosen, and those who would like to host the next meeting should start putting together proposals in the near future. It would be desirable to have a decision made about the 2022 meeting site in 2020. Thus, I would ask anyone interested in hosting the next meeting to contact me. We can discuss the meeting requirements and your plans to submit a proposal. I look forward to hearing from interested parties. Julius Schachter"

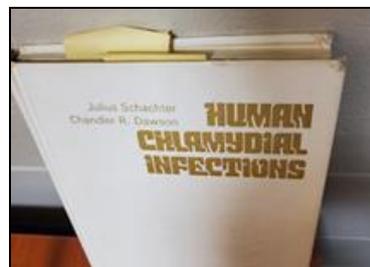
Continuing the ISHCI with the high standards Julie established would be a fitting tribute and a way to show our respect and gratitude to the man who provided us leadership for five decades.



Max Chernesky, Julie, Tom Quinn, Rick Stephens and Jorma Paavonen at the 14th International Symposium on Human Chlamydial Infections, Woudschoten, Netherlands, 2018

From Bobbie van der Poll:

On my very first day working in a Chlamydia diagnostics and research lab in 1982, my boss said, "Sit down and read The Book". I, of course, asked, "What book?" and he replied, "Schachter". Indeed, Julius Schachter literally wrote the book on chlamydia (I still have this on my book shelf and it is well-worn).



Julie was a "personality" and he exemplified the meaning of "larger than life" – agree with him or not, you were forced to listen to his perspective and he was right more often than not. He played a key role in establishing the importance of genital chlamydial infections, securing funding for chlamydia control and prevention programs, and making chlamydia a notifiable disease. He worked tirelessly first on understanding the role of chlamydia in eye disease and subsequently on trachoma elimination programs in which he was still very active. We recently finished a large multisite study of extra-genital infections and we have been working on a manuscript describing the results. All of this is to say, he has been an important person in my life for nearly 40 years and I am diminished by his passing. Our field has lost a giant.



Julie, Charlotte Gaydos and Bobbie van der Poll in San Francisco 2015

From Angelika Stary:

The World has lost an excellent scientist, a precious friend, a wonderful person, a supportive mentor, a fascinating entertainer, a loving father... and much more.

It was in 1983 when our ways crossed for the first time and I had the chance to visit Julie Schachter in his laboratory in San Francisco. It was the start of a long-lasting friendship of 37 years. Since then, I had the chance to share results from diagnostic comparison studies with Julie, to participate at many meetings, symposia, conferences, and eventually co-chair sessions with him, and to

exchange experiences on many issues of *Chlamydia trachomatis* research.

Julie had a unique enthusiasm for the truth of chlamydia research, and enabled many people in the scientific field to share his knowledge, experiences, and opinions. But he was also a critical researcher, he accepted different opinions, but never wrong results. His comment during a conference to a colleague after his oral presentation: "What you showed were not inclusion bodies and if you want to publish your results, you will get problems".

He had a broad horizon of interests and lived life to the full: he encouraged his co-workers, worked hard to publish his results and get grants for his studies, discussed with CDC and FDA to convince them, enjoyed meeting colleagues and friends, was well informed about the best restaurants with good wine and excellent food, and often combined meetings with spending some time at golf courses. And above all, he was an enthusiastic father!

I had the privilege to organize the International Chlamydia Symposium in 2010 in Fuschl together with his co-workers Jeanne Moncada and Eric Schneider, and to host his family, with little Alexander, in Mondsee during a site visit. For the International Chlamydia Symposia venues, he was always looking for places that were easy to reach with good facilities, reasonable prizes, good food, interesting surroundings, and possibly a golf course nearby! He always wanted to offer participants a good mixture of science and comfort and enjoyment.



Julie with Angelika Stary and Max Chernesky at the 12th International Symposium on Human Chlamydial Infections, Austria, 2010

He enabled so many people in the scientific field by sharing his knowledge, experiences, and opinion. He had a unique enthusiasm for the truth of chlamydia research, but also for good wine, excellent food, and playing golf. He lived life to the full, and was always there for his friends. We have lost a unique personality. Without Julie, the chlamydia world will not be the same anymore.

A new year

I suspect most of us were very relieved to see the end of 2020. Yet, it was a year of some of the fastest advancements in global medicine occurring in our lifetimes. The discovery of a new pathogen, right through to successful multi-centre drug trials and the roll-out of a vaccine in less than 12 months, was a remarkable achievement.

However, I think the biggest impact it had on us all is to remind us that human life is precious and must always be valued. I had communications with many of you about Julie, and how the death of a colleague and friend highlights that we must cherish the time we spend with people. Life, especially at the moment, may not always turn out the way we hope and expect.

IUSTI's Values and Principles

STI care is of course all about people and relationships, and the delivery of good STI care is underpinned by the principles of inclusivity and respect and for everyone. When I became President I pledged that IUSTI would make its beliefs on sexual and reproductive rights clear and visible on our website. Dr Dennis Fortenberry, from Indiana University School of Medicine, who is an elected member of the World Executive Committee, kindly produced the Values and Principles. These were discussed and approved at the World Executive Committee in October 2020 and are now available for you all to read on <https://iusti.org/about-iusti/values/>



Also, Patty Garcia, from the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Lima, Peru, with a team of other World Executive Committee members (including Dennis Fortenberry), has written an article on 'The role of STI prevention and control programs in reducing gender, sexual and STI stigma'. This is an open access article which can be accessed on <https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S2589537021000444>

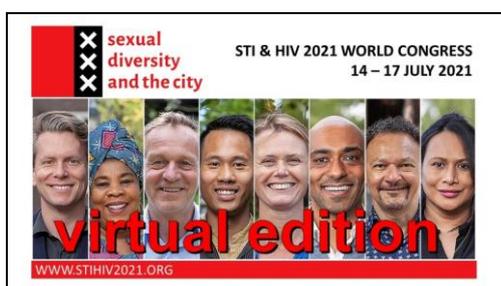
I encourage you all to read our Values and Principles and the article on stigma. We should, of course, all be ensuring they are embedded into our working practice.

ISSTD/IUSTI World STI&HIV Congress 'in Amsterdam' virtually, 14-17 July 2021

On another positive note, we have the joint ISSTD/IUSTI World STI&HIV Congress to look forward to which is taking place 'in Amsterdam' virtually between 14-17 July 2021. The theme of the conference is 'sexual diversity and the city' and it will involve communities most affected by STIs & HIV. There will also be several sessions organised in collaboration with the International AIDS Society which will cover the latest developments on

overlapping issues between HIV and the other STIs. Henry de Vries, and his team, have introduced several innovative features to make this virtual conference different and more exciting than others you may have attended. These include live talk shows with presenters, experts and moderators, discussing posted and live questions from the participants.

Registration is open and there is a reduction in fees for full IUSTI members. For those of you working in low and lower-middle income countries, the registration fee is even less, so this is a particularly good opportunity for you and your colleagues to 'attend' this congress as I'm aware many of you find it difficult to get to these meetings in person due to travel and accommodation costs.



Please see the full advertisement at the end of this newsletter for more detail about the congress, and please REGISTER NOW!

I look forward to 'seeing' you all there.

Janet Wilson, IUSTI-World President

Regional Reports

Asia Pacific

Report by Roy Chan, Singapore

Singapore AIDS Conferences have been held every 2 years since 1998. They provide a platform where health care professionals, researchers, public health officials, community partners, policy makers, PLWHA, key populations and affected communities can come together to take stock of the situation and share new knowledge and information that can stop the spread of HIV, address HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and improve care and support for PLHIV. The 12th SAC was built on the momentum of previous conferences and invigorate and energise programmes to end HIV in Singapore.

The theme for 12th SAC was "HIV and STI in the Time of COVID-19" and was held virtually.

There were 4 webinars spread over the 2 Saturdays. Each webinar was anchored by a plenary talk, followed by 4 to 5 panel presentations

and a Q & A session. Attendance was very good, 250 on day 1 and 300 on day 2, with active participation in the Q & A session by delegates and panellists.

This is a brief outline of the programme, with links to the sessions on YouTube.

WEBINAR 1: COVID-19 and its impact on HIV/STI – Epidemiology, Risk behaviour, Prevention Programmes

Plenary 1- "Overcoming the Impact of COVID-19 on HIV and STI in Asia and Pacific"

Mr. Eamonn Murphy, *Regional Director, UNAIDS, Asia and the Pacific*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkFQOqZY8JU&t=113s>

WEBINAR 2: Ending HIV

Plenary 2 - "Progress towards Ending HIV in Asia and Pacific"

A/Prof. Jason Ong, *Senior Research Fellow, Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, Associate Professor, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHWGXcnxLMc&t=165s>

WEBINAR 3: PrEP Implementation and Scale-up - Updates

Plenary 3 - "PrEP implementation and scale up - Experience from Australia"

Prof. Andrew Grulich, *Theme Director, Populations and Prevention and Head, HIV Epidemiology and Prevention Program,*

The Kirby Institute UNSW Sydney, Governing Council, International AIDS Society

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gplF5yEd6EQ&t=4068s>

WEBINAR 4: Update on HIV Treatment and Cure

Plenary 4 - Towards a cure: advances in the Science and pathways to the clinic

Prof. Sharon Lewin, *Director of the Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, Professor of Medicine at The University of Melbourne President-Elect International AIDS Society*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih9AUwBII70&t=67s>

Report by Kaushal Verma, Regional Chair, IUSTI-AP

The IUSTI-AP held a virtual EXCO meeting on 27th November 2020. In the meeting the EXCO members deliberated on the issue of IUSTI-AP elections since the term of the EXCO was getting over shortly and the EXCO/AGM which were to be held in December 2020 during IUSTI World meeting at Bangkok could not be held due to COVID-19 pandemic. As per the IUSTI-AP Statute "the office bearers are eligible for another term if they have not already served three continuous

terms in the same position". Therefore the EXCO unanimously decided that the present EXCO office bearers be given Another Term in office, as was done for the IUSTI-World EXCO in its virtual meeting held on 12th October 2020, considering the impact of the COVID-19 on the organizational and professional activities of IUSTI. This decision of EXCO was approved by the IUSTI-AP members/General body online.

The IUSTI-AP EXCO is:

- Regional Chair - Prof. Kaushal Verma - India
- Honorary Secretary - Dr. Ryoichi Hamasuna - Japan
- Honorary Treasurer- Dr. Anne Robertson - New Zealand
- Honorary membership Secretary- Dr. Pachara Sirivongrangson - Thailand
- Immediate Past Regional Chair - Dr. Xiang sheng Chen - China
- Sub Regional Representatives:
- Vice Chair Oceania pacific Subregion - Dr. Catherine O' Connor (Australia)
- Vice Chair South East Asia Subregion - Prof. Sunil Sethi (India)
- Vice Chair East Asia Subregion - Dr. Pingyu Zhou (China)
- Vice Chair East Asia Subregion - Dr. Satoshi Takahashi (Japan)



IUSTI initiative in reducing STI-related stigma.

IUSTI has published a commentary under the leadership of Patricia J. Garcia and J. Dennis Fortenberry in *EClinicalMedicine* (Lancet) ([https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(21\)00044-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(21)00044-4/fulltext)). Suzanne M. Garland and Somesh Gupta represented the IUSTI-AP region in this initiative. IUSTI recommends systematically implement tools to confront and ameliorate STI-related stigma.

Somesh Gupta

Europe

I . It has been almost a year by now since we haven't been able to meet eye to eye

IUSTI Europe as an organisation has been in an absolutely new situation during the past year, as has been the rest of the world. But we are one

world spinning around the sun and the challenges we have to face during these changing times are the same for each one of us.

The current moment is important for all of us to learn and share experiences, how to make the best of these times so that we can be well equipped for the future.

So I decided to ask my colleagues throughout Europe to give me a short overview of what have been their most stressful moments, successes of IUSTI- Europe online events, and how they see the future of IUSTI Europe conferences.

Here are their thoughts:

Norbert H. Brockmeyer, Germany

First of all, choices about suitable online platforms had to be made. Depending on whether online events were focused on presentations or interactive workshops etc. we had to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the various platforms at hand. For our large annual/biannual conferences, we had the impression that our partners in the pharmaceutical industry were more cautious with regards to sponsoring online conferences because they feared too little interaction with the participants. We also had to find suitable options for the pharmaceutical industry to present their portfolio in an online event (digital hospitality lounges, satellite symposia etc.). We feared, last but not least, that participants might be oversaturated by online events and that discussions and exchange might not take place as usual.

Instead we found out that many people were very eager in participating in discussions. At the same time, many participants reported that they missed personal exchange and the networking experience. As discussed above, we were surprised by the activity of participants who took part in discussions and also by the feedback we got after our online events.

Our success stories - Given that people did not have to travel and therefore calculate a large amount of time, we were able to invite important speakers with very restricted availabilities. Also last minute participants could take part without having to plan a journey in order to participate.

We think that in the future, online conferences might be a good option with regards to environmental aspects. At the same time, we found out that online conferences cannot fully replace the communicative character and the networking experience of a live conference. Hybrid options might be a good compromise for the future.

Jørgen Skov Jensen, Denmark

I have not been involved in organising an online event, but as a speaker it has been difficult not to have the direct contact with the audience and not to have the option to informally discuss questions after the lecture.

The number of participants has increased because of lower costs travelling and often also lower registration fees. The ability to save time and costs travelling and thereby also allowing students and others to participate has been a major advance. For presentations which are streamed on demand, it is great to be able to plan the time for the presentation according to the other obligations. I believe that virtual attendance should be an option with a lower registration fee for future meetings. Whether it should be with direct participation or with on-demand streaming could be discussed. There are advantages to both ways. With the environmental costs of air-traffic, there will be increasing demands by participants for this option in the coming years, I believe.

Henry de Vries, Netherland

My biggest fear is that people get tired of virtual conferences as is. They offer no real opportunity for interaction which is the key for many to attend a live conference. We have 400 abstracts coming in which is half of what we anticipated. That probably has to do with the pandemic greatly reducing the opportunity to do any research in the past year. What the impact on the number of registrations will be is to be seen. Another thing affected is sponsor revenues. We see that sponsor fees are being reduced because industries value virtual conferences less. This brings in the financial risks of large virtual conferences because the required platforms are expensive.

The attention span of virtual participants is less. We will try to involve participants by having live talk shows during the conference fully dedicated to discussion and interaction. Two weeks ahead of the conference all talks and posters are accessible online and can be commented on via a chat function. During the conference we can then jump into discussions with selected presenters, experts and live audiences since the participants had the opportunity to see the content beforehand. It's all uncharted territory so let's see if it works as anticipated. Some say the number of participants can exceed the regular numbers because more people can afford to register with no travel and hotel expenses. Less registrations is something to consider also based on the reduced number of abstracts submitted. For example, I spoke on an Indian dermatology conference last week with 3,500 viewers online. So, there are unprecedented opportunities.

We have to rework the idea of future conferences. The International AIDS society stated they will not go back to the old days of 20.000+ participants on one location. It's not sustainable, it's not healthy, it's old school. The alternatives are local conferences with online opportunities for colleagues living afar to join in. As they say in disruptive economy: "think local, act global".

Josephe Kobakhidze, Georgia

Biggest challenge in successfully carrying out the event is that there is no direct contact with people that we have experienced before pandemic. Activity is drastically low on webinars and the number of participants has decreased approximately 30%. Best success is that after webinar has completed participants continue communication in chatroom.

Before the pandemic ends and before all countries will be able vaccines, it will be better to make hybrid events, where the conference will be available for participants who can't come due to closed borders or some other reason, but will have the opportunity to access the conference online.

Carmen Lisboa, Portugal

Biggest challenges have been to motivate our mates to participate, to encourage pharmaceutical companies to support virtual conferences / meetings / courses.

Biggest fears have been the low number of participants, no active participation during the meeting, and lack of feedback. On the other hand, there was, all the time, a real fear of technical problems (no connection, no sound...).

We had an increased number of registered participants, but the number of participants that, actually, go to the platform was lower. But, in general, the interest was reflected in the number of questions asked at the end of the presentation. I had the best experiences with a hybrid system- the chairman/main invited speaker were at the conference site and the other participants were online.

I think that in the near future we will have virtual conferences. The hybrid system will always have supporters and it will attract an additional group of participants. So, we should use the experience gained from these media at conferences to come.

Electra Nicolaidou, Greece

I have not organised a webinar yet, but I have participated in several events as speaker or chair. Overall, it was a positive experience. The participation is usually high and the participants use the chat for their questions, which are as many as expected. The chat gives an opportunity to the more shy of the participants to come forward and ask their question.

An extremely positive aspect of the webinars is the possibility for the registered participants to view the content later, when they have the time. This has been very useful, at least for me. I have watched many more lectures this way in the webinars than what I usually watch at an actual congress.

Deniz Gögekin, Turkey

We organised many webinars during the Covid-19 pandemic. The biggest challenge in online meetings is the lack of close contact between the presenters and the audience. Online meetings

brought the advantage of asking questions in written format, which helped the shy participants to ask questions. The activity of the participants during big events like congresses accommodated fewer participants per session than they would normally in live meetings. However, smaller meetings like webinars gave us the opportunity to address a much larger audience (such as country wide) than we would at local meetings.

We addressed a much higher (almost 5-fold) number of participants than in local meetings and hosted foreign speakers.

Meetings are not only platforms where scientific work is shared and presented but they also have a strong social component where colleagues meet and interact with each other and establish networks, which is critical for development, growth and collaboration. Thus, face-to-face meetings are irreplaceable and I would prefer to go back to live meetings as soon as the pandemic allows us. On the other hand, virtual platforms provided the opportunity to invite scientific celebrities as presenters without the fuss of arranging travel and accommodation. So, even face-to-face conferences can have virtual sessions and smaller meetings such as webinars can be used to access a larger audience with much smaller costs. Especially for IUSTI this is a great opportunity to access and involve young scientists and create a sense of belonging among them for the organization.

Marco Cusini, Italy

The biggest challenges for us have been connection problems and quality of the platform. There are quite a lot of different platforms and they are getting better and better and this should not be a problem anymore. The other thing is that attention sitting at a screen cannot last very long in my opinion and webinars should not exceed two - three hours. The activity of participants is similar to face-to-face events; there is a hard core of active and interested participants and a "swamp" of less interested people. I do not think there is any solution to increase the number of actives versus passives. The number of participants has remained steady. For sure supply of webinars has greatly increased.

I must conclude that I strongly desire face-to-face meetings. Again I want to point out the importance of then not being too long. Many of us do not consider these events as true congresses and in several cases they continue with their normal activities during the webinar itself.

Andrew Winter, Scotland, United Kingdom

I actually think things have been very positive in the UK with our online events. We have seen regular attendance of over 100 in our weekly seminars.

Strangely I've done more education this year and feel more connected to colleagues, both

throughout this and social media, than before when we had occasional physical meetings.

For online organisation the major challenge is time to practice – which is usually longer than the actual talk done. It is also very hard delivering an exciting motivating talk entirely to a blank camera with no audience reaction, and worse doing this for a pre-recording. We found having someone curating feedback and summarising questions works well.

The best thing has been the ability to immediately network and set up follow up meetings – for example in one meeting I discovered through the side chat that a colleague in another part of the country was in the middle of a very difficult time in her area setting up staff COVID testing. I was able to reach out and arrange a catch up the next day to share our own experience and give her someone outside her situation to talk to. This would be much harder in a physical meeting.

Martí Vall Mayans, Spain

The biggest challenge in organising online events was to change at short notice from physical to virtual. Now we have the experience due to Covid, regrettably, and things can be planned well in advance. The other challenge was the uncertainties about this new modality. Activity/passivity of the participants has not changed much compared to virtual, in fact virtual conference might increase activity especially if the chairs are able to encourage it and there is an online system in place to facilitate this

I do not have numbers about the amount of participants. The Bucharest conference was my first experience and it was organised in difficult conditions. Virtual, probably would increase participants in the end. Best success was seeing people enjoying and participating.

I prefer physical conference, but I am afraid that Covid is conditioning the organisation of meetings for some time.

Mikhail Gomberg, Russia

2020 was the first year in IUSTI history when we were unable to meet each other face to face. It was also the first year in IUSTI history when our annual IUSTI-Europe Congress, which had been planned to take place in Bucharest, went online. Thanks to the new technologies, it was all very successful. And, for the first time in our history all presentations were pre-recorded in order to prevent any translation surprises. As you all know, almost 10 years ago IUSTI-World approved establishing the regional IUSTI organization in Russia, the Guild of Specialists in STI "USTI RU". Russia, of course, is a huge country, and before Covid led to the adoption of new technologies, we would annually organize around 20 conferences in various Russian cities, in order to acquaint representatives of the various fields involved in STI issues with all the news that emerges in our area. Chief among this would be the new IUSTI-Europe

guidelines, and the new trends discussed at the annual IUSTI-Europe conferences and at the IUSTI-World. Unfortunately, the language barrier remains the major reason for the insufficient familiarity of the Russian specialists with the work of their international colleagues. Hence, our USTI-Russia conferences have always been a subject of lively interest within the country.

At the 2019 IUSTI-Europe in Tallinn, for the first time in IUSTI history, a special Russian-language session was organized. A large group of Russian participants at the Tallinn Congress were able to see for themselves the IUSTI at its best. This unusual event would later be repeatedly discussed at various Russian professional forums.

However, Russian specialists are still interested in the international activity of IUSTI. For this reason, we thought of using the unique opportunity presented by the existence of taped presentations from the Bucharest Congress in order to organize the final 2020 USTI-Russia conference together with IUSTI-Europe. We shared this idea with the IUSTI-Europe Regional Director Dr. Airi Poder, and we are very grateful to her for the understanding she expressed in response.

Since this was, in every sense, a first attempt of this sort, we discussed the possibility of using taped presentations from the Bucharest Congress with the Congress president, Prof. George Sorin Tiplica, as well as with the authors of those presentations we considered. We are grateful to them for their agreement. Due to the unusual nature of the event, we thought that it deserved to be done at the national, rather than a local/provincial level. As conference organizers, we provided simultaneous translation of each presentation. It should be noted that our event was scheduled for December, after the end of the official availability of presentations at the Bucharest Congress webpage.

The First Russian Online Congress on Sexually Transmitted Infections "IUSTI-2020" took place on December 4 and 5, 2020. It was organized with international participation and took place online, at www.iusti.ru. The Congress was organized with the support of the European branch of the International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Infections IUSTI-Europe and of its Russian organization, the Guild of specialists in STI "USTI RU".

The main purpose of the event was promoting of the international and interdisciplinary interaction of STI specialists in order to develop a joint approach and to improve the standards of laboratory control and organization of effective prophylaxis, as well as raising the quality of STI treatment. The online congress facilitated exchange of experience between the Russian and international colleagues, acquisition of new knowledge about modern possibilities of STI diagnostics, treatment and prophylaxis.

We are extremely grateful to Dr. Ari Poder who agreed to be a co-chair of the Congress and made

a wonderful presentation at its opening. We are particularly grateful to those colleagues who agreed to make available their presentations for the Russian audience: Claudia Heller-Vitouch, Gilbert Donders, Henri de Vries, Derek Freedman, George Sorin Tiplica and Alexandra-Irina-Butacu. In addition to them, 18 leading Russian experts took part in the Congress as co-chairmen and presenters. The event participants were welcomed by the chief specialist gynecologists and dermatovenereologists from various federal districts and regions of Russia.

The Congress united on the same online platform over 7 thousand medical specialists from Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, France, Belgium, Latvia, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Moldova and other European and ex-Soviet countries.

II Report about collaboration with ECDC (Rajul Patel, United Kingdom)

The ECDC during much of 2020-21 has been mapping the spread of COVID-19 and reporting on the effectiveness of control strategies. It is currently tracking the progress of mutations and will be looking closely at the success of vaccines. Members from the Blood Borne Virus group and the STI section have been focused on these new duties and it is remarkable that they have still found time to work on their previous program of activity. Perhaps the most important area is the forthcoming ECDC Operational guidance on PrEP which sets out 10 key principles that Countries looking to role out effective PrEP programs should follow so as to demonstrate equity, effectiveness and completeness of provision. This document should shortly be available and will most include signposting to detailed descriptions of successful programmes in real world settings comparable to most environments STI physicians will work in.

Although many parts of Europe have started PrEP role out comprehensive coverage remains a pressing priority for the European Region. At the Bucharest meeting Teymur Noori identified the significant PrEP gap that remains (possibly 500,000 individuals who run significant risks of HIV acquisition in the region that could be reduced further through PrEP usage). IUSTI- Europe is considering what in addition we can do to facilitate PrEP programs. In January 2021 at a meeting attended by Otilia Mardh, Teymur Noori, Deniz Gökengin and Raj Patel, we looked at the formal and informal PrEP provision across Europe and the availability of up-to-date guidance on PrEP that EACS, BHIVA, and BASHH provide. Currently in Europe the provision of antiretrovirals in some countries is considered the exclusive domain of physicians who look after HIV infection who have limited experience of risk reduction and are not involved in the management of those not infected with HIV. We wondered how our own guidance could be strengthened to promote the

consideration of PrEP provision as matter of standard care. We propose to issue a statement on the importance of risk management in any sexual health consultation and the need to signpost patients to PrEP even if this is on an informal supply basis (through patient lead PrEP programmes).

III European STI Guidelines Project: report for IUSTI Global Newsletter – February 2021 (Keith Radcliffe, UK)

The work of the Guidelines Project has been slowed down because of the global pandemic of COVID-19 but it is continuing.

A new guideline on molluscum contagiosum has been completed and it has been published in the *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (JEADV)*.

The following guidelines have been updated and published in the *JEADV*:

- Syphilis
- Genital warts

The gonorrhoea guideline has been revised and published in the *International Journal of STD and AIDS*.

Revision of the following guidelines has been completed and they have been submitted for publication in the *JEADV*:

- Proctitis, procto-colitis and enteritis
- HIV testing

The following guidelines are currently under revision:

- *Chlamydia trachomatis*
- *Mycoplasma genitalium*
- Partner management
- Balano-posthitis
- Vulval conditions

Work is ongoing on a new guideline on urethritis; this will replace the existing one on non-gonococcal urethritis and it will also make reference to specific causes of urethritis i.e. *N. gonorrhoeae*, *C. trachomatis* and *M. genitalium*.

All the published guidelines are available on the IUSTI website as is information on the protocol for their production and the composition of the Editorial Board.

Information for patients based on all the guidelines is available on the website in English and some of the information has been translated into other European languages.

IV IUSTI – Europe: Webinars (Sorin Tiplica, Romania; Derek Freedman, Ireland)

We are living and working in the new world of COVID-19. To meet this challenge, IUSTI-Europe is launching a series of Webinars to reach out to its members and the wider community of Sexually Transmitted Infection healthcare workers.

We are starting with a pilot series of four Webinars, to be held on the last Wednesday of March, April, May, and June. This series builds on the success of the IUSTI-E Bucharest 2020 Virtual Congress and has been coordinated by George Sorin Tiplica and Derek Freedman, together with officers of IUSTI-Europe. The British Association of Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) have kindly allowed us to use four of their weekly Webinar slots. Each Webinar will last 60 – 90 minutes.

The first Webinar, entitled “The Impact of COVID-19 on STI Epidemiology and Services in Europe”, will be held on Wednesday, 31st March. Daniel Simões and Andrew Winter will present data from the EPIUnit. This will be followed by presentations on the current situation in Italy, Greece, Spain, Sweden, England and Russia. The Webinar will wind up with Prof. Nicolas Dupin who will present on the “Dermatological Manifestations of COVID-19”, with particular emphasis on genital manifestations and the consideration of the differential diagnosis with Syphilis, HIV seroconversion, Scabies and Epstein Barr virus.

The Webinar series speakers will include Prof. Kimberly Workowski, who will introduce the new CDC 2021 Guidelines and the IUSTI-EU Guideline editors will join in for a Panel discussion. The other planned Webinars will focus on “Chronic Viral STI’s and their Impact on Patients”, and “Challenging Infections – *Mycoplasma genitalium* and *Neisseria gonorrhoea*”.

We hope that these Webinars will be of practical use to our members, and the wider STI healthcare community. Our aspiration is to provide the latest information and resources to ensure optimal care of our patients, and to stimulate new initiatives of management and research.

V Summary

So, a year has passed since the world had suddenly changed and live communication between colleagues - which until that change seemed so self-evident and customary - moved over to the Internet. The pros and cons of online communication have become quite clear during the past year’s experience.

The advantage of online conferences is definitely that significantly less time and money is required compared to face-to-face conferences, which gives the possibility to participate for a much wider audience. At the same time, in the case of online conferencing, the workload of preparing a presentation is significantly higher, the interest of sponsors is much lower and the attention is more distracted than compared to live conferences.

I asked 20 colleagues at my home country if they took time off on the day during the conference (which is self-evident in a face-to-face conference) and got the answer that no one did it.

So I believe that if the opportunity for face-to-face conferences is restored, we should definitely use it,

but bring with us, the past years' online conference experience - so that the conferences will take place in parallel - live and online. Thus, the future is most likely in hybrid conferences.

Despite the fact that everything is different than we have been used to, the activities have not been interrupted - both inter-organizational and intra-organizational cooperation with various partners has continued, simply in a different form.

Airi Poder

Latin America

A supplement publication including articles on the diagnosis, treatment and surveillance of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) – based on the new Brazilian STI Protocol – has been launched. It is a joint publication by *Epidemiologia e Serviços de Saúde (Epidemiology and Health Services Journal)* and *Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Medicina Tropical (Journal of the Brazilian Society of Tropical Medicine)* and has been simultaneously published in three languages – Portuguese, Spanish and English. The journals are indexed in Pubmed and the publication aims to improve the quality of evidence-based care and disseminate the protocol to managers and health professionals.

The papers in Portuguese and Spanish will be available at:

https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_serial&pid=2237-9622&lng=en&nrm=iso

In English, at:

https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_serial&pid=0037-8682&lng=en&nrm=iso



***Neisseria gonorrhoeae* antimicrobial resistance surveillance network in Brazil** – The first edition (2015-2016) included 550 isolates from the five regions that make up the country. The main results indicated high resistance to ciprofloxacin and decreased susceptibility to ceftriaxone (0,4%) and cefixime (6,9%). Following these results, Brazil's STI treatment guideline was reviewed, and treatment recommendations changed, excluding

ciprofloxacin from the syndromic treatment and for epidemiologically diagnosed gonorrhoeae. (10.1093/jac/dky090 link to the paper.) Whole Genome Sequencing was performed on 548 isolates; the paper “Genomic epidemiology of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* elucidating the gonococcal antimicrobial resistance and lineages/sub lineages across Brazil, 2015–16” is available (doi:10.1093/jac/dkaa318 link).

In the second edition in Brazil (2018-2020), there was an expansion of the STI sites/centers which make up the current sentinel surveillance network for *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* resistance. In this new edition, the minimum inhibitory concentrations included the antimicrobials spectinomycin and gentamicin in addition to penicillin, tetracycline, ciprofloxacin, azithromycin, ceftriaxone and cefixime.

The etiology of male urethral discharge and genital ulcers is being added to the research, through molecular tests carried out with biological samples collected from patients seen across the sentinel network.

Thus, at the end of this second edition, it will be possible to obtain data on the main etiologic agents that cause urethral discharge and genital ulcers with national coverage, until now unknown in the country.

Herpes in Rio and HPV in Rio – There will be a free online symposium on these topics on February 27; 1260 people have already registered so far. The event has support from the Departamento de Doenças de Condições Crônicas e IST at the Brazilian Ministry of Health, from the Pan-American Health Organization, and from other Brazilian medical societies.



Latin American participation in the Program Science Initiative to Improve Effective Coverage across HIV & STI Prevention and Care Cascades Workshop Series organized by Gates Foundation and University of Manitoba-Latin American participants were Freddy Tinajeros, Patricia Garcia, Angelica Miranda and Adele Schwartz Benzaken on February 24 and 25, 2021.



Update from Argentina



During 2020, and despite the pandemic, the Argentine Association for the Study of Infections in Gynecology and Obstetrics and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections (ASAIGO-ITS) carried out the virtual post-graduate annual course “Up-to-date on genital obs&gyn infections and STI” with 121 subscriptions.



A full day, the 9th Course for Residents “Miguel Angel Maglione” was based on clinical records. Scheduled December 12th 9 AM – 4 PM. It consisted of clinical cases presented by residents training in OBS GYN and microbiology followed by experts’ discussion and up to date.

ASAIGO-ITS has released two webinars:

- 1- Syphilis. Why it's still on the agenda?”, August 5th. 7- 9 pm with an audience of 1207 professionals, concerning genital ulcers- clinical presentations- diagnostics-treatment- Q&A. (<https://www.gador.com.ar/webinar/webinar-sifilis-sigue-estando-nuestra-agenda/>).

- 2- “Recurrent genital cervico-vaginal infections” performed in August 12th 7-9 pm with 470 assistants, the subjects were vaginal microbiome, *C. trachomatis* and *N. gonorrhoeae* infections, recurrent vulvo-vaginitis infections, perinatology and recurrent vaginal infections. (<https://www.gador.com.ar/webinar/asaigo-problema-recurrente-las-infecciones-cervicovaginales/>).

Some members of ASAIGO-ITS gave dissertations and lectures about STI in Online Congresses and courses for other societies, like Argentine Society for Climacterics Study (AAPEC, November 2020), Argentine Society for Cervix Pathology and Colposcopy (SAPTGYC, November 2020), Argentine Society of Pediatric (December 2020), Argentine Association of Biochemistry, etc. Diagnosis and treatment of STI Guidelines was published by the Argentine Infectology Society (<https://sadi.org.ar/comisiones-de-trabajo/comision-de-sida-y-ets/item/1364-recomendaciones-de-diagnostico-y-tratamiento-de-las-infecciones-de-transmision-sexual>), in which participated physicians and microbiologists involved in the subject of STIs in Argentina.

Adele Benzaken

Conference Update

IUSTI Events:

STI & HIV 2021 World Congress / World IUSTI Conference
 Dates: 14-17 July 2021
 Location: Virtual (see next page for further details)
 Website: <https://www.stihiv2021.org/>

IUSTI Asia-Pacific Congress
 Dates: 1-4 December 2021
 Location: Bangkok, Thailand
 Website: To be confirmed

STI Global Update is published by the International Union against Sexually Transmitted Infections. Its aims are to provide

an international perspective on the management and control of sexually acquired infections.

Prof. Jonathan Ross, Editor
jonathan.ross@uhb.nhs.uk

Further information on the activities of IUSTI available at www.iusti.org

REGISTRATION FOR THE 24th STI & HIV WORLD VIRTUAL CONFERENCE FROM AMSTERDAM IS OPEN

Our bi-annual conference organised by the International Society for STD Research (ISSTD) in collaboration with IUSTI World will be broadcast from Amsterdam July 14-17.

Alas, in the current pandemic we cannot welcome you in our beautiful city.

Nonetheless, as the tradition stipulates it will be a state-of-the-art virtual meeting. The scientific committee chaired by Lisa Manhart and Kit Fairley attracted a list of top speakers.

Together we stand strong in our joint fight to end epidemics!

To maximize interaction opportunities, all presentations and posters will be available 2 weeks ahead of the conference. It will give you all the time to see the content at your own convenience, and post questions and remarks for the presenters. During the conference we will organise talk shows with presenters, experts and moderators for live discussions and to address both your posted and live questions. Besides, there will be online tools and plenty of opportunities to interact with participants.

The theme of the conference is "sexual diversity and the city" and we will involve communities most affected by STI & HIV. To be truly effective as a researcher, and healthcare worker we need to reach out, and include the communities we serve in our efforts. To help you bridge this gap we have invited several community leaders. Moreover, we invited practice-based research abstracts to inform you what works in community involvement.

Lastly, we will have several sessions organised in collaboration with the International AIDS Society (IAS) to cover the latest developments at the crossroads of STI & HIV infections. Together we stand strong in our joint fight to end epidemics!

Henry de Vries (President of ISSTD)
& **Janet Wilson** (President of IUSTI World)

STI & HIV WORLD CONGRESS 2021
14 - 17 JULY 2021

SPEAKERS LIST

Jane Anderson

What's required as HIV epidemic moves toward eliminating transmission

David Asch

Behavioral Economics examples for STI control

Lindley Barbee

Partner management in the time of AMR:
How to use antibiotics responsibly

Elizabeth Bukusi

Prioritizing non-HIV STI interventions in low resource settings

Nicole Dukers (Dukers-Muijers)

Chlamydia controversies: screening & rectal treatment

Claudia Estcourt

Digital sexual health

Yonatan Grad

The evolution of genomics in STIs – including GC, MG, and syphilis

Kenneth Mayer

The New Abnormal: STI and HIV Divergence and Convergence

Bill (William) Miller

Effectiveness of interventions without RCTs

Sanjay (Saravanan) Ram

Development of Immunotherapeutic approaches against GC

Shruta Rawat

Strengthening communities' response and engagement in HIV/STI research

Justin Smith

Implementation Science – from theory to practice

Ron Stall

Syndemics and Sex in the City

Register at stihiv2021.org now to join this exciting new virtual format. The 'early bird' registration fee for full IUSTI members is only €295 and ends April 5. We look forward to 'seeing' you.