

IPA teams up with Baycrest Telehealth on historic broadcast

News release— March 30, 2006

On March 30 the International Psychogeriatric Association (IPA) delivered its first live, international telehealth broadcast on mental health challenges in the elderly to medical colleagues in four time zones around the world.

The new IPA Learning Portal was broadcast from the telehealth suites of Toronto's Baycrest, an internationally renowned academic health sciences centre known for its expertise in brain functioning and mental health of aging adults. Joining Canada in the "virtual" meeting were Argentina, Brazil, Ireland and Romania.

In his opening greetings from Canada, IPA president Dr. Joel Sadavoy told the 350 participants from all five countries that the event was not only a *first* for his association, but the "first of its kind for psychogeriatrics worldwide."

The four-hour program focused on "Clinical Dilemmas: The Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD)". Two complex patient cases were presented to the international audience, followed by questions and discussion about diagnosis and treatment.

"It's wonderful to have diverse perspectives from around the world," said Baycrest psychiatrist Dr. Susan Lieff who presented the second case study. "We all bring our own unique lenses and see different things in our cases, so it's very enriching and informing to have other people looking at your treatment challenges because inevitably it's a very creative process and they come up with things that hadn't occurred to you otherwise."

There was much work behind the scenes to ramp up for the event and identify a format and topics that would be most useful to participants.

"When planning the curriculum we devoted 40 percent of the conference time to interaction and discussion with the international sites," said Dr. David Conn, chair of the IPA Task Force that organized the event and psychiatrist-in-chief at Baycrest. "We wanted to maximize opportunities for sharing of experience regarding these clinical dilemmas."

After the event, Argentina's Dr. Ricardo Allegri sent an email applauding the IPA initiative, noting that his country's top behavioural neurologist, psychiatrist and geriatrician attended the session. "All were surprised by the (videoconferencing) technology and a lot of people have asked me about the next meeting," he wrote.

While virtual educational rounds will never completely replace person-to-person meetings, rising travel costs and immigration concerns in the post 9/11 world make videoconferencing an attractive option, said one of the keynote speakers during a break in the session.

"It's a cost effective way of conveying information to large numbers of professionals the world over and I think you're going to see more of these events in the future," predicted Dr. Sanford Finkel, clinical professor of Psychiatry, University of Chicago Medical School, and past president of the IPA. He delivered an overview of BPSD to set the stage for the case presentations.

The collegial sharing of knowledge among top minds around the world in virtual educational forums is a sign of the times. Recognizing the growing market in e-health, Baycrest has developed a recognized expertise in the production of educational events which can be broadcast internationally via interactive videoconference.

"Providing the technology platform to enable these virtual educational sessions to happen fulfills our mandate of sharing knowledge and expertise with the world," said Tim Patterson, Baycrest's telehealth coordinator. "It's also our social responsibility."

The conference was organized by a Task Force of the IPA which included Drs. Conn, Chair (Canada), Ricardo Allegri (Argentina), Susan Lieff (Canada), João Machado (Brazil), Greg Swanwick (Ireland), Nicoleta Tataru (Romania); and Tim Patterson (Baycrest telehealth coordinator) and Susan Oster (IPA Secretariat).



Dr. Sanford Finkel, clinical professor of Psychiatry, University of Chicago Medical School, and past president of the International Psychogeriatric Association, presents an overview of the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia from Canada's Baycrest to health colleagues in Brazil, Argentina, Ireland and Romania.