

Report from the First SRNT Latin America & Second Iberoamerican conference on Tobacco Control, 5-7 September 2007, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil: Strengthening the science for tobacco control in the age of the FCTC

Background

In 2004 [SRNT](#) celebrated its 10th anniversary. During its first decade it grew from around 100 to over 900 members, sponsored well attended annual meetings and influential satellite conferences to promote research and founded a new peer reviewed journal *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*. During these ten years considerable progress has been made in meeting the objective of the society to stimulate new knowledge about nicotine in all its forms. The Society currently has over a thousand members over 20 countries around the world. Although this growth has been encouraging, membership is still concentrated in North America and Europe, and so for this meeting we joined with the Interamerican Heart Foundation ([IAHF](#)), an organization dedicated to promoting health and reducing heart diseases and stroke in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Brazilian Association for the Study of Alcohol and Drugs ([ABEAD](#)) to hold SRNT's first meeting in Latin America. Over the past 10 years IAHF has made tobacco control in the region a major priority, and has worked with other advocacy organizations towards mobilizing governments and civil society to ratify the FCTC. It has helped organize NGOs in countries that did not have a movement, has organized capacity building sessions on advocacy in various cities, and is at present working with the FCA to monitor progress on the FCTC. In addition to advocacy activities, the IAHF has supported research, smoking cessation programs, and the Pan American Health Organization program Smoke Free Americas to promote smoke-free environments. ABEAD is the main professional organization in Brazil for those who work on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and includes in its membership doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, psychologists and community leaders. It organizes national and international seminars, conferences and workshops, and for the last 11 years, an annual meeting in Rio on tobacco control, always with distinguished international speakers.

There are 95 million smokers in Latin America and the Caribbean and approximately 506,000 die every year from smoking related [disease](#). This conference brought together people with complementary expertise, from all over the region, to exchange information and motivate greater efforts for control tobacco. The conference objectives were to encourage involvement in public health science and policy development on tobacco use throughout Latin America, and to bring together tobacco control scientists and policy advocates to learn from the latest science and from each other. It was jointly run by SRNT and IAHF with local partner ABEAD, and run in parallel with the ABEAD annual conference.

People

The conference presidents were Analice Gigliotti, President of ABEAD, and Beatriz Marcet Champagne, Chief Executive of the Inter American Heart Foundation. [Martin Raw](#),

Nottingham University, England, chaired the scientific programme committee, and the organising committee also included: Harry Lando, SRNT, USA; Jacques le Houezec, President, SRNT Europe; Sabrina Pressman, Brazil; Paula Akil, Brazil; Priscila Marx, Brazil; Mira Aghi, SRNT Asia Africa Oceana & Latin America; and Catherine Jo, American Cancer Society. Ray Niarua, President of SRNT opened the conference on behalf of SRNT, along with Analice, Beatriz and Martin. The conference attracted 310 delegates from 26 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, UK, USA, Uruguay, Venezuela. The conference was sponsored by the American Cancer Society (ACS), Bloomberg Philanthropies, Free and Clear, GlaxoSmithKline (Brazil), GlaxoSmithKline, Global Treatment Partnership, INCA, Brasil, Johnson & Johnson, National Cancer Institute (USA), National Institute on Drug Abuse (USA), Pfizer (Brazil), and Pfizer (Latin America). The conference logistics were handled (superbly) by Metodo Eventos of Rio (Silvia Lemgruber, Beatriz Lemgruber) and IAHF (Javier Valenzuela) also gave invaluable administrative support. The abstracts were reviewed by Catherine Jo, Daniel Seijas, Natasha Herrera, Rosa Sandoval, Sabrina Pressman, Paula Akil, Analice Gigliotti.

The programme in outline

The programme was rich and varied, covered basic science as well as advocacy, included several pre-conference and breakfast meetings, and a meeting at which SRNT discussed with participants how SRNT can increase its membership in, and better serve the region.

The opening ceremony was entitled “Strengthening the science for tobacco control in the age of the FCTC” with brief welcomes from Analice Gigliotti, Ray Niaura, Beatriz Marcet Champagne, and Martin Raw, an opening keynote address from Joaquin Barnoya, giving an overview of tobacco control in Latin America, and the Global Smokefree Partnership Awards and Interamerican *Vital Air* Journalism Awards.

Preconference and breakfast meetings included: an International Campaign Development workshop organised by Karen Gutierrez, Global Dialogue for Effective Stop Smoking Campaigns; a pre-conference on women and tobacco organised by INWAT (International Network of Women Against Tobacco), and breakfast sessions on youth advocacy and on the [ITC project](#).

There were five keynote addresses: Women and tobacco, Margaretha Haglund; Tobacco dependence and its treatment, Robert West; Economic aspects of tobacco control, Ayda Yurekli; Progress on the FCTC in Latin America, Francis Thompson; Smokefree environments, Armando Peruga.

Apart from the five keynote addresses there were 12 parallel sessions: writing for science journals, quitlines, tobacco control research in Latin America, intensive treatment, tobacco industry strategies, health warnings and packages, the FCTC, crop substitution, industry strategy and documents, cross border research collaboration, the Global Smokefree Partnership, and smokefree environments. Finally, almost 100 posters were accepted.

For further details you can view the [outline programme](#) and [full programme](#).

A personal reaction

There were so many excellent sessions and presentations, and so many world experts present, that it would be invidious to single out any for special mention, and take up far too much space to summarize all 17 main sessions, never mind the breakfast sessions and pre-conferences. A lot of people put a vast amount of time and energy into the meeting, the event company that handled logistics was outstanding, the sponsors were generous and seemed easily persuaded of the importance of this first meeting of its kind in the region, and something of the success of the event can be seen by the fact that we had to close registrations, because we filled the venue, slightly beyond its capacity actually. And of course in the end the meeting was a success because of the people who came and participated, not least the many many sessions organisers and speakers, who gave their time generously and to great effect. Rio is not a bad setting for a meeting and we even had warm Brazilian weather. The meeting was high energy, contained a stimulating mix of science and advocacy, generated a strong sense of community and friendship within the region and also with other regions (for example representatives of the Bangkok first SRNT Asian meeting were with us), and was, I think most agree, enormous fun. Several groups have expressed the desire to host the next Latin America and Caribbean meeting and we are hoping to hold it in late 2009; the probable (but not yet finally decided) venue is Mexico City.

Martin Raw
03 June 2008