

APRIL 01, 2003 - The Preeclampsia Foundation announced today that it will host top medical experts in the field of preeclampsia and representatives from government and global health organizations at the first International Preeclampsia Summit this weekend at the Aljoia Conference Center in Seattle. Attendees have been drawn from the international medical community, research organizations, government and world health programs to identify and prioritize appropriate interventions to reduce maternal and infant illness and death in the developing world due to preeclampsia and eclampsia. At the close of the two-day meeting, participants are expected to endorse an international call to action.

Preeclampsia, a leading cause of maternal death and illness, affects approximately 5 percent of all pregnancies — or 6 million births annually.* The disorder occurs during pregnancy and affects both the mother and the unborn baby. Preeclampsia is characterized by elevated blood pressure, swelling and protein in the urine. It is a rapidly progressive condition and if undetected or untreated can lead to stroke, kidney failure, liver failure and hemorrhage. It is responsible for 15 percent of all premature births. Preliminary data from the World Health Organization indicates that 12 percent of newborns born to mothers with preeclampsia/eclampsia will die within the first month of life.

Preeclampsia has taken a back seat for too long,” said Anne Garrett, executive director of the Preeclampsia Foundation. “Despite the fact that it is a serious and relatively common complication of pregnancy, public awareness, research dollars and funding for intervention strategies are just not there. We’re using the Summit as a catalyst for change. We’ve got the right players assembled, and we’re ready to roll up our sleeves to devise and endorse an international call to action.”

“The Summit is about building partnerships, making connections and sharing insights on a global scale,” said Carla AbouZahr, coordinator of Advocacy, Communications and Evaluation in the Family and Community Health Cluster for the World Health Organization. “A disease that impacts 6 million pregnancies a year merits more than our attention — it merits our commitment to change. There is much we can do with the information we already have to reduce maternal and infant illness and death.”

About the International Preeclampsia Summit

The Summit is made possible by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It is also supported by funds from the Preeclampsia Foundation, the UK group, Action on Pre-Eclampsia, and the HELLP Syndrome Society.

Participants include Dr. Gordon Perkin, senior fellow, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Dr. Christopher Redman, England; Dr. Thomas R. Easterling, University of Washington; and Dr. Allen Rosenfield, dean, Columbia University School of Public Health, among others.

Agenda

The opening night session, titled "A Patient's Perspective," will feature several speakers who are preeclampsia survivors. Speakers include Preeclampsia Foundation members Anne Garrett, Eleni Tsigas, Christine Lee and Carol Hall. Hall lost her only child, Nicki, and her first grandchild to eclampsia.

The all-day Saturday meeting will include lectures from top preeclampsia experts about diagnosis and treatment and breakout sessions to prioritize known interventions. In addition, there will be a photo exhibit of women and their families who have experienced or died from preeclampsia/eclampsia. The exhibit will be available for public viewing when the meeting is not in session.