

NAPSW 2007:

New Horizons for Perinatal Social Work Served with a Taste of Southern Hospitality

The gorgeous and green college town of Asheville, North Carolina was the sight of this year's annual NAPSW National Conference. Building on the theme *New Horizons for Perinatal Social Work*, conference chairs **Laura Dillard and Myra Jackson** and their conference team did a tremendous job of coordinating this professionally stimulating event with a flair of Southern hospitality that was a treat for all.

A reception was held early in the evening Wednesday, May 9, on the Renaissance Hotel's garden patio, followed by the opening banquet, where President **Dawn Raadt** warmly welcomed participants and their guests to this year's event. After a delicious dinner, this year's Award for Excellence Winner **Deborah Calvert** was honored for her outstanding contributions to the field of perinatal social work. Deb has served as a social worker in the NICU at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for more than 15 years. We were inspired as we heard from her coworkers and family of her commitment to her work,



Keynote Speaker Lou Benson

and by Deb's own comments as she accepted her award. The night soon shifted gears, as **Dr. Lou Benson**, director of services at Treasure Coast Hospices, entertained and motivated us with his presentation, *Are You Fun to Be With?* He challenged the audience to become a positive presence to those we work with by finding humor and lightness



Award of Excellence Winner Deb Calvert is flanked by colleagues Marty Hudson (left) and Elissa Truitt.

amongst some of the serious things we encounter each day in our work with families and coworkers. Not only did he make us all laugh, he also reminded us to keep things in perspective in the midst of our jobs.

The next morning saw our first general session, a presentation by **Dr. Terri Combs-Orne**, professor from the College of Social Work at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Combs-

Orne's presentation, *Using New Research in Genetics and Neuroscience to Understand the Importance of Environment for the Pregnant Woman, Her Fetus and Newborn*, emphasized the significance of a knowledge base in genetics and neuroscience, and how that can make a difference in our practice as social workers. She did a great job of demystifying the area of research and science-based information. Her presentation underscored the age-old theory that both nature (science/genetics) and nurture

(attachment theory, parenting) are equally important as we assess the psychosocial needs of our clients in practice.

The rest of the day offered a variety of workshops. **Annette Proctor, Maria Gamvroulas and Shelly Bunker**, all LCSW's from Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City, presented their findings on a research project they conducted



Newly-elected officers and directors (from the left): Calene Duggard, Lisa Baker, Aimee Maas, Kathy Johann, Mary Denato, Ali Tiedke, Barb Menard, Debby Segi-Kovach, and Dianne Glenn.



The 2007 Conference Committee (from the left): Laura Dillard (co-chair), Judie McCoyd, Margery Pentland, Myra Jackson (co-chair), Debby Segi-Kovach, Linda Debaer, Sharon Williams, Carol Kahn, Joni Hardcastle, Lisa Baker, and Lisa Wellborn.

regarding professional communication in the NICU and *‘What Parents Really Want.’* Their results focused on family care conferences, preferred timelines and settings, and exploring perceived levels of stress for families in their NICU setting.

Another workshop was led by **Dr. Leon Ginsburg** of Appalachian State University’s School of Social Work, who discussed *Ethical Issues and the Application of the NASW Code of Ethics.* He reviewed the basics of the NASW code of ethics and presented us with examples of ethical dilemmas, drawing upon his expertise from his time as a member of NASW’s governing board.

Workplace safety was at the center of a presentation by **Aimee Maas**, LISW and **Sharon Williams**, LISW, both NICU social workers from Cincinnati’s Children’s Hospital. They discussed effective strategies in dealing with workplace violence and conflict. As daily headlines confirm the increase in violence in our society, their presentation reminded us of the emotionally charged environment many of us work in and challenged us to consider policies and procedures that aim to optimize a safe work environment.

After this stimulating first full day of presentations, several of the conference participants enjoyed this year’s optional night out. Some opted to tour the magnificent Biltmore

Estate and Winery. Others enjoyed the many restaurants, shops, and sites that Asheville, a charming college town, had to offer, all within walking distance of the hotel.

Friday morning was jump-started by **Sarah Schleifer’s** excellent presentation on post-partum depression. Her work as an LCSW at Englewood Hospital in New Jersey has provided her with a wealth of experience dealing with this all too common women’s issue. Her presentation discussed co-morbid psychiatric disorders that often accompany PPD, with a special focus and discussion on eating disorders.



Conference Co-Chairs Laura Dillard and Myra Jackson.



NAPSW’s annual business meeting was next on the agenda, a time which saw the election of new officers and board members. This was followed by an all-conference luncheon where we sat at tables as regions. Chairperson for next year’s conference, Kathy Johann, gave a short presentation on what is in store for us in Indianapolis, and gave members a chance to give input as to topics they would like to hear addressed.

That afternoon saw another series of workshops which covered topics pertinent to our profession. Deb Calvert, recipient of this year’s Award of Excellence, shared her expertise in her presentation *Supervision with the Student Intern.* **Mary Johnson**, MA, chaplain and professor at Rochester’s Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, also presented an excellent workshop addressing religion and ethics in the perinatal setting that was both thought-provoking and entertaining.

After a delicious breakfast Saturday morning, the conference was officially closed by NAPSW President Dawn Raadt. Once again we were challenged to return to our various work settings across the country and in Canada to pursue excellence as we work with families. As one conference participant put it, “I always leave this conference so motivated!...This conference puts me in touch with other social workers that are facing dilemmas just like the ones I’m facing. The camaraderie is fantastic and the information I learn is so applicable to what I am doing at work every day.”

—Calene Dugard, LCSW