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# Dr Jo Black: My reflections on the International Marcé Conference

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By Dr Jo Black, Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist with Devon Partnership NHS Trust and Associate National Clinical Director for Perinatal Mental Health for NHS England. (pictured here with Dr Giles Berrisford).

*[The Marcé Society for Perinatal Mental Health](#) is dedicated to supporting research and services surrounding prenatal & postpartum mental health for mothers, fathers and their babies. The society has a biennial international conference to showcase cutting edge research and practice. This year's conference took place in Melbourne at the end of September. In this blog, Dr Jo Black reflects on her experience.*

I never expected to be moved by epigenetics. And yet at Marcé 2016 when Professor Rachel Yehuda described the intergenerational trauma in the children of holocaust survivors, the

room was transfixed. The tale of human suffering into the second and third generations was emotional and unexpected.

I was inspired by the bravery needed by a Malaysian PhD student to collect narratives from women in Malaysia prisons who have been convicted of filicide. I understood such a collection of personal narratives has never been systematically collected in Malaysia before and those of us who were there were seeing pioneering research in action.

I was pleasantly delighted on the final afternoon by the series chaired by Prof Chandra from Bangalore challenging the validity of Western rating scale the EPDS in an Indian context and with a low literacy population – so many lessons for multicultural Britain.



I toured Mother and Baby Units in Australia and New Zealand, viewing different models of care in different health care systems. I brought new ideas and thoughts home as a result. Some of these were incredibly simple, such as these door hangers which enabled mums and babies to communicate that they were ready for visitors, or signs which demonstrated that crawling babies, not clinicians, food trolleys, drugs trolleys or anything else have right of way!

I shared meals with peers from dozens of countries over the period of the conference. In my view, the international language of sharing food makes friends of colleagues.

I was immensely proud to represent the UK, Devon specifically and NHSE more widely. It is not an over exaggeration to say the perinatal world is watching us as we lead the way. No other country has seen the need and responded as comprehensively as ours. The changes we will see in perinatal service provision in England over the next five years are the envy of colleagues worldwide. So, no pressure, but we need to do this really well!

I am mindful that we need to respect our enormous privilege and wherever and however possible support the exceptional work in grassroots projects elsewhere in the world.



The conference's multiculturalism got me thinking about the enormous wealth of expertise and cultural diversity that we have in the NHS. How can we best develop leadership and encourage partnerships in the NHS to best support recovery for mothers and infants from a range of backgrounds living in the UK and elsewhere?

Sometimes we need to be challenged. Marcé 2016 certainly challenged me. My only regret was a frustration that, (like Sunday night Poldark and Victoria) the scheduling meant some of my preferred sessions clashed. We did not have the conference equivalent of an iPlayer for catch up.

Sometimes we need to be thankful. My time travelling gave me a chance to reflect on how proud we should all be of those who have campaigned, sometimes for a whole lifetime, to get us to the point we have reached here in England. I am thankful for the voices of champions, parents, alliances, politicians, economists, charities, practitioners, agitators, pioneers, trailblazers and volunteers who have got us to this point. Don't stop now – we need your wisdom more than ever to get this right.

Sometimes we need to be moved. I was surprised at how moving many of the sessions were. Maybe when we hear a voice we haven't heard before it reminds us again of the human stories behind the awe-inspiring science.



I hope to attend Marcé 2018 in Bangalore, the first time it will have been hosted in a low income country. I wonder what news I can bring to Bangalore of our progress? How do we learn from and add to the global conversation about how to tailor help for mothers and their children whatever their culture and ethnicity? How will we have we made best use of the tax payers' money allocated to providing comprehensive perinatal services?

I know attending international meetings is expensive and time consuming. It is also humbling, stimulating, challenging and brings a diversity which is uniquely possible when we are open to learning from other countries, practices, cultures and research bases.

Thank you Marcé Society and I hope to see you in Bangalore.

*[Mums and Babies in Mind](#) supports local leaders in four areas of England to improve care and quality of life for mums with mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year of life, and their babies.*

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