



"Beyond Diagnosis: Interventions for Individuals Living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder", September 2005 Toronto FASD Conference.

Mary Cunningham, Ernie Parsons MPP, Margaret Sprenger, Bruce Ritchie

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Margaret Sprenger and [Bruce Ritchie](#) received the **St. Michael's Hospital "Award for Pioneer Work in the Area of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders"**. St. Michael's Hospital is a teaching hospital affiliated with the University of Toronto and provides a major FASD Diagnostic Clinic.

Bruce Ritchie presented on the issue of [FASD being grossly under-diagnosed](#) and under-reported. Official statistics claim an incidence of about 1% in the general population. However, evidence indicates high exposure rates at very high levels of alcohol consumption and lack of diagnostic training of physicians and other health personnel combine with other factors to make the official incidence statistics meaningless.

The Conference received a scientific paper on "[Formic Acid in the Drinking Patient and the Expectant Mother](#)" by Dr. Bhushan Kapur. Methanol in small amounts is present along with ethanol in beverage alcohol. The body's natural enzymes preferentially metabolize ethanol while methanol breaks down into highly neurotoxic Formic Acid. **Use of high levels of Folic Acid was found to inhibit brain damage caused by the methanol.** The use of Folic Acid during pregnancy has been recommended for several years to prevent neural tube defects. However, this study indicates that even higher levels of Folic Acid can be very beneficial to the developing baby, particularly where alcohol exposure is a factor. Folic Acid is mandated as an additive to all flour sold in Canada. The debate has begun on its required addition to all beverage alcohol to help mitigate damage caused to both infants and adults.

"Neonatal Screening for Prenatal Alcohol Exposure - The Grey Bruce Study" by Joey Gareri, HBSc, MSc student was presented. It is a confirmation study on meconium assay detecting Fatty Acid Ethyl Esters as a biomarker of maternal alcohol consumption during the final 20 weeks of pregnancy. Meconium is the first fecal excretion from the newborn baby. The FAEE study, found a high level of exposure in 4% of newborns. This confirms studies by United States Drug Testing Laboratories using the Avitar MecStat-ETOH meconium testing for FAEE's that have shown 15% to 18% of newborns have been exposed to significant levels of alcohol in the final 20 weeks with 4% having been exposed to very high levels of alcohol. Meconium testing should be part of the standard testing protocol for all newborns. "Results of meconium tests offer a unique opportunity to record gestational exposure to ethanol. Missing this opportunity can leave many children impaired by alcohol at risk of being undiagnosed: evidence of maternal drinking is a prerequisite for diagnosis of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in cases where pathognomonic facial features are not apparent."

<http://www.acbr.com/fas/toc2.htm>