



# **Fetal Alcohol Exposure: Time to Know, Time to Act**

Ontario's Provincial Conference  
April 10-11, 2003

## **Syllabus A7**

**Before ...Sperm meets Egg!**

**Janette Bowie**

## **Janette Bowie**

Public Health Nurse  
Halton Region Health Department  
1151 Bronte Rd.  
Oakville, ON L6M 3L1  
Telephone: 905-825-6060 ext. 7830 Fax: 905-825-8588

Janette Bowie has always possessed a passion for issues related to Healthy Communities, Healthy Parents and Healthy Children. While living in the Simcoe area she had an opportunity to work in partnership with a phenomenal multidisciplinary team to develop and promote “Health Before Pregnancy” programming. This work led to her involvement with Best Start Barrie as a representative of the Simcoe County District Health Unit. In her role as a Public Health Nurse at Halton Region Health Department she continues to develop and bring “Health Before Pregnancy” programs to the Halton Community. Today she brings lessons, ideas and hopes from these communities, programs and her grassroots experience.

**Before ... Sperm meets Egg!**  
**“Health before Pregnancy.... Makes a difference!”**

Janette Bowie, RN, BScN,  
Baby and Parent Health Program,  
Halton Region Health Department,  
Oakville, Ontario

So what do sperm and egg have to do with it, especially at a conference for FAS?

Both the health of the father and the health of the mother ***even before pregnancy***, influence their children’s health: not only at birth, but also for the rest of that child’s life. We all know, too well, the life long effects of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

**Alcohol is the leading known preventable cause of birth defects!**

This session looks at a wide range of issues that influence a person’s decision to become a parent and the impact of their health, to their future child’s health.

Alcohol use is looked at in conjunction with many other factors.

In our helping roles, each person has the opportunity to consider how they might incorporate the message of “Health before Pregnancy” into the important work they are currently doing.

Taking action right now is important for every person you serve. Waiting until pregnancy is confirmed is simply ***too late!***

**Why?**

**Because....**

- Alcohol affects fertility.
- Alcohol affects fetal development in the first trimester when organs are developing (just as many teratogens do).
- Alcohol also affects fetal development throughout the pregnancy and the first year of life as brain cells grow.
- Alcohol affects how people parent their children.
- Children born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder are more challenging to parent.
- There is no cure for these children, once they are affected by alcohol.
- Alcohol is the leading known preventable cause of birth defects!

People with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder have an unacceptable level of secondary disability that impairs their quality of life, is costly physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially to their family, and is costly to society.

- Mental Health problems 90%,
- Disrupted School experience 60%,
- Trouble with the Law 60%,
- Confinement (incarceration, inpatient treatment) 50%,
- Inappropriate Sexual Behavior 50%
- Alcohol and Drug problems 30%

People with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder are caught through no fault of their own in a quality of life that places them at continued high risk and as they age their future children at high risk. And so the cycle repeats itself.

There are many different types of drinking behaviors. Some can be easily altered. Some take extensive work. People need to change their drinking behavior before conception occurs. Yet, there are many confusing messages about alcohol. Some people make the decision to quit drinking once they have a positive pregnancy test. Damage to the fetus may already have occurred.

People who are under the influence of alcohol are more likely to have unplanned and unprotected sex, leading to unplanned pregnancy. Again this puts a baby at greater risk.

Join in this session to increase your general awareness and knowledge about “Health Before Pregnancy”.

Understand why we need to work together to support a range of strategies (from individual and family based to community wide) to raise awareness that **Alcohol is the leading known preventable cause of birth defects!**”

Explore a range of strategies that each person can implement in their day-to-day work that supports individuals, families, communities and agencies, to address the challenges related to alcohol use and pregnancy.

Advocate for strategies and services to, support behavior change with individuals, support families in their important work of parenting and nurturing, and foster environmental change within our communities.

This work is paramount to the health of our children.