

Southern California Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

March 2013

SCSCAP Annual Speaker Meeting *by Brooke Spanos, M.D.*

On January 13th, SCSCAP held its annual speaker meeting at the Marina Del Rey Marriott Hotel. We had the pleasure of welcoming the AACAP president, Dr. Martin Drell, as our distinguished speaker. His lecture topic reviewed the field of Infant Psychiatry, and was playfully titled, “How Infant Psychiatry Helped Me Know How to Promote Socio-Emotional Development and Resiliency, and Know What to Do When There’s A Problem.” Dr. Drell did a very thorough summary of the integral theorists and philosophers of the field. He succeeded in bringing many of us back to the days of our residency didactics or our time studying for the psychiatry boards. T. Barry Brazelton, John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, and Mary Main were just a few of the familiar names reviewed, and I personally was exposed to a number of new theorists as well.



Dr. Drell reminded us of the foundations of our field that we don’t always consider incorporating in our daily professional lives. The children who present to our offices tend to have a number of risk factors that predispose them to insecure attachments or other difficulties that can result in problems with emotional development. How then, can we encourage resiliency in this population to overcome life’s inevitable challenges?

As a new mom, I’m sure you can imagine that I was listening very carefully. Many of us may have the role of both psychiatrist and parent, which always creates an interesting perspective on what we learn about infant psychiatry. His mention of Selma Fraiberg’s “Ghosts in the Nursery” was a good reminder of how parenting requires internal reflection to ensure any “ghosts” we may have are not unconsciously influencing our ability to parent. I also enjoyed hearing of the studies emphasizing the natural resiliency of children. As Dr. Drell reviewed, the children we consider “resilient” are not “superhuman,” nor are they particularly unusual, (see Ann Masten’s article “Ordinary Magic” for more info). The same can be said for the caretaker. Parents need not be “super parents” in order to raise an emotionally healthy child. Rather, according to Winnicott and those that came after him, they need only to be “good enough.” I wonder if the same could be said for child psychiatrists. My hope is that in our daily office routines, merely reading a child’s cues and responding to them appropriately and consistently can have lasting effects in creating resiliency.

Again we thank Dr. Drell for his thought provoking discussion.
