

26 June 2018

Marcus Rijken about the 'Reproductive & Maternal Health: a Global Perspective' Summer School

"We unite various fields of expertise and share each other's insights"

A number of Summer Schools connected to child development are being organised this year. What do students learn at these events and who is organising them? We talk to gynaecologist and researcher Dr Marcus Rijken about the 'Reproductive & Maternal Health: a Global Perspective' Summer School.



The Summer School class of 2017

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU RECOLLECT LAST YEAR'S SUMMER SCHOOL, WHICH MARKED THE FIRST EDITION?

"The week was very valuable to me as it enabled me to discuss global social issues with young and passionate people. We shared a mission of safe motherhood, even though we all came from very different parts of the world. I was extremely glad to have this experience last year. Among the participants in our Summer School could well be the future medical leaders in their respective countries of origin. It would be great if this Summer School contributed in any way to their knowledge and network. If so, UMC Utrecht will have helped to make the future just a little bit brighter. Because of its tremendous success, Dr Joyce Browne, Prof. Kitty Bloemenkamp and I jumped at the chance to organise a second edition this year."

Our responsibility is not limited to the health of Dutch mothers.

HOW DID THE IDEA COME ABOUT TO ORGANISE THIS SUMMER SCHOOL?

"The Summer School is in full alignment with UMC Utrecht's vision that society requires a broader view. Our responsibility is not limited to the health of Dutch mothers. My engagement with this mission is partly informed by my work as Board Member of the Dutch Working Party on International Safe Motherhood & Reproductive Health. Prof. Jos van Roosmalen introduced the notion of 'obstetric ectoscopy', which he will talk about during the event. He advocates an outward focus transcending Dutch

gynaecology. In the Summer School, we will create synergy between Safe Motherhood, the obstetrics ward of the Wilhelmina Children's Hospital and Global Health at the Julius Center of UMC Utrecht. As a result, we unite various fields of expertise and share each other's insights."



WHAT IS ON THE PROGRAMME?

"The stories from the field are what excites me most of all. One example is the lecture by Prof. Tarek Mequid, a gynaecologist from Zanzibar. Drawing on personal experiences, he can enlighten us about safe care during and after pregnancy. Our programme will explore several angles of the topic. For example, Anke van der Kwaak specialises in gender issues and Prof. Kitty Bloemenkamp is an authority on maternal registration systems across the globe. In addition, key representatives of the World Health

Organization (WHO) will discuss recent large-scale research on the quality of obstetric care, among other things. My own presentation will tackle ways of improving access to Caesarean sections for women in need while preventing unnecessary Caesareans."

“The pillars of children's physical well-being are a healthy pregnancy, a safe birth and a healthy mother.”

Dr Marcus Rijken

Gynaecologist and researcher UMC Utrecht

WHAT ARE THE TARGET GROUPS OF THIS SUMMER SCHOOL?

"The Summer School is aimed at Master's students in medicine, obstetrics and biomedical sciences. Doctors, obstetricians and researchers may also take an interest in the programme, however. What matters the most is daring to extend your gaze beyond national borders. Participants are expected to have a global view as well as a passion for providing quality care to pregnant women round the world."



WHAT'S YOUR KEY MESSAGE TO THE PARTICIPANTS?

"What I want to convey is my eagerness to improve global care. I intend to translate my inner drive into empowering others to become involved in this undertaking. While we try to prevent even the smallest complications during pregnancy and delivery here in Utrecht, women 5,000 kilometres away die just because they cannot access proper care. For this exact reason, we should share our new and safe approach to limiting the number of unnecessary Caesarean sections with countries such as Ghana or Sierra Leone, among other things. We can achieve this by translating our knowledge to local circumstances. After consultation with doctors in the area, we can develop a joint plan for improvement."

It is becoming increasingly clear that developments in the womb can significantly affect the onset of psychological issues manifesting later in life

HOW IS THE SUMMER SCHOOL LINKED TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

"Mothers are indispensable to their children's development, and the evidence for that is particularly abundant in low-income countries. A child and its brain already start developing in the womb, as was shown, for instance, through MRI research by the YOUth research team during the period around childbirth. It is also becoming increasingly clear that developments in the womb can significantly affect the onset of psychological issues manifesting later in life. The delivery itself is also very important, as findings suggest that a Caesarean increases a child's future risk of allergies or obesity, for instance. In short, the pillars of children's physical well-being are a healthy pregnancy, a safe birth and a healthy mother."