

Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Croatia: Consolidating Progress and Shaping the Future of Women's Health

Obstetrics and gynaecology in Croatia stand at an important juncture, characterized by notable clinical achievements alongside emerging demographic, organizational, and scientific challenges. As a country with a long tradition of academic medicine and a publicly funded healthcare system, Croatia has made substantial progress in improving maternal and reproductive health outcomes. At the same time, shifts in population structure, workforce dynamics, and patient expectations require renewed attention to evidence-based practice, innovation, and system-wide collaboration. This special issue of the Southeast European Medical Journal seeks to highlight these themes within a Croatian context, while situating them in the broader regional and European landscape.

Croatia continues to report favorable maternal mortality rates and high coverage of antenatal and intrapartum care. Standardized prenatal surveillance, access to hospital-based deliveries, and the availability of specialist obstetric care have contributed to these outcomes. Nevertheless, challenges persist, particularly in relation to increasing maternal age, the rising prevalence of obesity and metabolic disorders, and the growing complexity of pregnancies associated with assisted reproductive technologies.

In gynaecology, Croatia faces a dual burden similar to that observed across Southeast Europe. Benign gynaecological conditions, including abnormal uterine bleeding, endometriosis, and pelvic floor dysfunction, exert a considerable impact on women's quality of life and healthcare utilization. While diagnostic and therapeutic options have advanced, timely access and uniformity of care vary between tertiary centers and peripheral hospitals. Strengthening referral pathways and expanding minimally invasive surgical expertise are key priorities for ensuring equitable care nationwide.

Gynaecological oncology represents a critical area for continued improvement. Despite the availability of effective screening and preventive strategies, cervical cancer incidence and mortality in Croatia remain higher than in many Western European countries. Ovarian and endometrial cancers further highlight the importance of early diagnosis, centralized care, and multidisciplinary tumor boards to optimize outcomes.

Reproductive medicine has developed rapidly in Croatia, supported by legislative frameworks that regulate assisted reproductive technologies within the public healthcare system. While access to infertility treatment has improved, ongoing debates regarding resource allocation, demographic policy, and ethical considerations reflect broader societal concerns. Integrating psychosocial support and ensuring equitable access across regions remain integral components of comprehensive fertility care. In addition, technological breakthrough presented in artificial intelligence represents additional challenge for practicing clinicians.

The translation of international guidelines into national practice is a recurring challenge in Croatian obstetrics and gynaecology. While Croatian clinicians actively engage with European and global professional societies, local adaptation of recommendations is necessary to reflect system capacity and patient populations. National clinical guidelines, registries, and quality assurance mechanisms play a pivotal role in harmonizing care and reducing unwarranted practice variation.

Education, research, and workforce sustainability are central to the future of the discipline. Croatian academic centers have a strong tradition of undergraduate and postgraduate training, yet workforce shortages, uneven distribution of specialists, and professional migration pose growing concerns. Investment in subspecialty training, mentorship programs, and research infrastructure is essential to retain expertise and foster innovation. Encouraging clinician-led research and participation in international collaborative studies will further strengthen Croatia's contribution to the global obstetrics and gynaecology community.

This special issue brings together scholarly work that reflects the realities of obstetrics and gynaecology practice in Croatia, while offering insights applicable across Southeast Europe. The contributions emphasize that advancing women's health requires not only clinical excellence but also coordinated public health strategies, patient-centered care, and sustained professional development.

As Guest Editor, I extend sincere thanks to the authors and reviewers whose work has made this issue possible. This issue has gathered colleagues from all parts of Croatia and reviewers from several European countries. It is my hope that the discussions presented here will stimulate critical reflection, inform clinical practice, and encourage collaboration within Croatia and beyond. By building on existing strengths and addressing persistent gaps, Croatian obstetrics and gynaecology can continue to evolve in alignment with the highest standards of modern medicine.

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