

THE COLLABORATIVE ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT (CHE)

Jerry Heindel, PhD

My fondest memories of CHE are of Alison Carlson. The most enthusiastic, dedicated, focused and charismatic facilitator of the CHE Fertility/Pregnancy Compromise Working Group and Senior Fellow at Commonwealth Health and Environment Program. To me, her name became synonymous with CHE. Her passion came from her years as an infertility patient, which led to her awareness that society was ignoring the effects of toxic chemicals on fertility.

My first memory is of the 2005 Fertility Workshop on Environmental Contaminants and Fertility Compromise organized by Alison. It was held at a Catholic Retreat Center, and we stayed in rooms used by the nuns, small and bleak and sparsely decorated. There were 45 scientists, doctors, fertility and reproductive health patient groups, environmental advocates and CHE representatives. An eclectic but high-powered and enthusiastic group. This was my first meeting with such diverse attendees, and it made for a fascinating and fruitful discussion. There were discussions of anogenital distance (AGD) and body parts some participants were not used to hearing about. I remember distinctly at the end of the meeting, everyone sitting in a big circle, and we all had to say something we were going to do to help improve fertility as a result of the workshop. The result was the Vallombrosa Consensus Statement on Environmental Contaminants and Human Fertility Compromise, which summarized the science and identified critical scientific gaps for the first time. It was groundbreaking, thanks to Alison.

Next up was the 2007 UCSF-CHE Summit on Reproductive Health and the Environment, attended by 400 attendees worldwide. This was a pioneering, multidiscipline, environmental reproductive health conference attended by health professionals, basic and clinical researchers, public health professionals, policymakers, advocates, funds and community health leaders: notice the similarity to Vallombrosa? Inclusiveness became the middle name of CHE, especially when Alison Carlson was involved, in this case, a co-chair with Linda Giudice of UCSF and Philip Lee, former US Assistant Secretary of Health Educa-



tion and Welfare. This Summit included innovative sessions such as, Conversations on Stage (pairing clinicians, reproductive health advocates, federal regulators, policymakers and funders) discussing how to work together effectively, and Breakout Groups focused on transdisciplinary discussions around reproductive health questions and issues that could help shape follow-up initiatives. Never before had there been a meeting of the minds and

sharing of ideas between attendees from such diverse fields.

I am so thankful for what CHE has done in Reproductive Health and the Environment. I am particularly grateful that Alison Carlson showed up at the right time and made CHE the center of Reproductive Health. In my work today with HEEDS, I use Alison's model; this fall we are bringing together a diverse group of obesity scientists, obesogen researchers, and NGOs at a workshop to get them in the same room in hopes of bringing obesogen science into mainstream obesity work. I hope we can use these lessons learned from Alison for many years to come.-||



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