

# 2020 STD PREVENTION CONFERENCE

2020 Vision: Disrupting Epidemics and Dismantling Disparities

## 2020 STD Prevention Conference Recap | #STDConf20

September 25, 2020

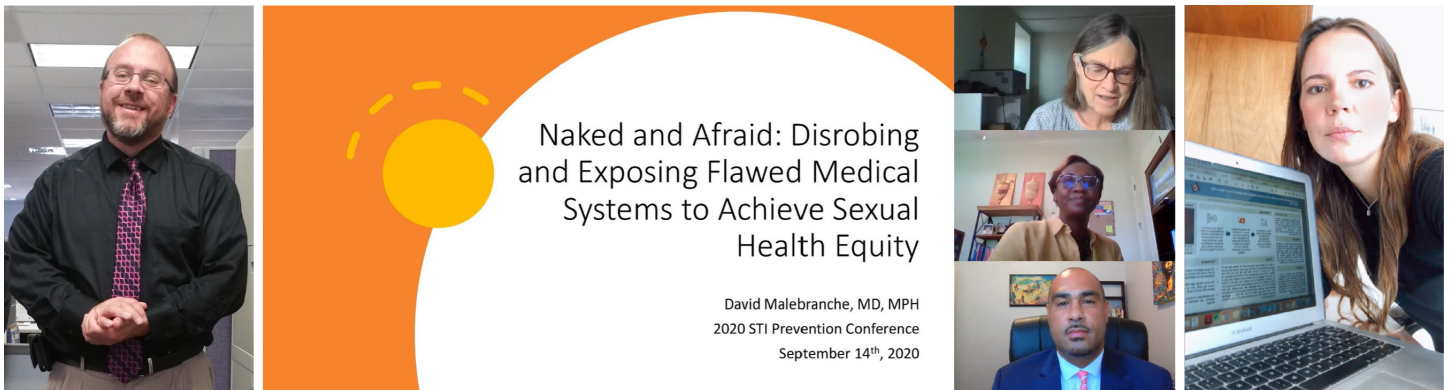
Dear Colleagues,

As quickly as it came, the [2020 STD Prevention Conference](#) is over! The first-ever virtual execution of this biannual conference was informative and thought-provoking, and I hope that it sowed seeds that will allow us to “Disrupt Epidemics and Dismantle Disparities” as the conference theme challenged.

If you weren't able to join us online, I'd like to share a few of my notes to give you a sense for the innovation in science, research, program and policy we explored over the nearly-two-week conference. Although the live content may be over, you can still [register](#) for the conference and access the content on-demand, as your schedule allows.

This year, we welcomed more than 1000 of our domestic and global partners and stakeholders from health departments, community-based organizations, academic institutions, and advocates. Throughout the conference, we were treated to more than 400 presentations and posters. We engaged in rich discussions about the biggest topics and trends in STD prevention and built connections with new colleagues.

We tugged at some of the strings of racism that weave throughout our nation's public health infrastructure. In his opening plenary, Dr. David Malebranche's narrative around the true story of one of his patients illustrated the real, systemic challenges faced by minority patients in healthcare. Our Center director, Dr. Jonathan Mermin moderated a fascinating panel discussion with Drs. Aletha Maybank and Leandro Mena, which encouraged us to build health equity into the heart of our institutions; not just “check a box.”



Photos left to right: Steve Kowalewski, the winner of the Jack N. Spencer Award; Dr. David Malebranche's opening plenary; and #SelfiewithScience social media poster contest winner, Dr. Juliana Baglietto.

We gathered around one of the greatest public health challenges of our generation – COVID-19, which has affected nearly every aspect of our daily lives. But we didn't just ruminate on all the things we already know; we talked about the course we will chart forward together, as we adapt to the rapidly changing healthcare landscape and find novel ways of working during the pandemic and beyond.

Specifically, I am excited to continue to see our field leverage three innovative strategies, to serve clients now and moving forward: utilizing and strengthening **STD express visits**; partnerships with **pharmacies and retail health clinics**;

and expanding **telemedicine services**, to provide STD testing and prevention services outside of the clinic setting.

And, as is the legacy of this conference, we touched on a range of other timely and groundbreaking topics in prevention. Leading researchers shared the latest data and science around congenital syphilis, novel developments in diagnostics and testing, and best practices for serving sexual minority populations, including transgender people.

We were thrilled to celebrate Steve Kowalewski's three-decade, STD prevention career as he was awarded the [Jack N. Spencer Award](#).

We awarded our randomly selected #SelfiewithScience social media poster contest winner: Dr. Juliana Baglietto, who presented, *Characterization of Ocular Syphilis in HIV positive patients in Specialized Clinics in Mexico City (2016-2018)* at the conference. Yesterday, I had the pleasure of talking to Dr. Baglietto about her research and career goals. Thank you to everyone who participated – I always enjoy seeing your innovative work and contributions to the field.

We reimagined traditional, in-person networking opportunities in a virtual environment. For example, we hosted the popular "[Meet the Experts](#)" roundtable by Zoom. Splitting the event into two, separate sessions, participants had the opportunity to meet a panel of nine diverse experts in our field to pick their brains about their areas of expertise and discuss career development and advancement. We played trivia online and shared a virtual "movie night" together.

We are so grateful to the conference committee for overcoming numerous logistical challenges to quickly pivot to a virtual format. And to the scientific committee for putting together a relevant, timely, and fascinating agenda.

On a personal note, I am honored to have received the [ASTDA Distinguished Career Award](#) during the conference and was humbled by the video of colleagues far and wide sharing their memories and well-wishes. Signing this e-mail is incredibly bittersweet as it will be my final STD Prevention Conference in my post as CDC's DSTDP Director. However, as always, these conferences remind me that we have a committed community, which is ready and able to take us into the future of STD prevention, and I look forward to watching the future of our field unfold.

Sincerely,

**Gail Bolan, MD**

Conference Co-Chair

Director, Division of STD Prevention

National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention