

ISSWSH 2022 Annual Meeting Location

Dear ISSWSH Community,

As you are all aware, ISSWSH has designated Dallas, Texas as the location for the upcoming 2022 Annual Meeting. The state government of Texas has recently instituted policies and legislation related to public health and healthcare that are inconsistent with most other states and conflict with US federal mandate and law. Currently, an executive order by the Governor of Texas prevents any entities including private businesses from requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for employees or customers. In addition, a recently enacted state law in Texas (SB 8) is significantly more restrictive on abortions, impacting reproductive healthcare for women and exposing some healthcare providers to the risk of litigation.

We understand that these circumstances are concerning to much of our membership, and some of you have suggested that ISSWSH demonstrate opposition to these policies and laws by moving the upcoming Annual Meeting to a different location outside of Texas.

After much deliberation, the ISSWSH leadership has decided to proceed with our 2022 Annual Meeting in Dallas, as planned. We believe that this decision serves the best interests of our society while maintaining our focus on our stated mission of facilitating communication among clinicians and researchers, supporting the highest standards of ethics and professionalism, and providing the public with accurate information about women's sexuality and sexual health.

As you can all appreciate, this is a complex situation and there are many factors to consider. We remain sensitive to issues related to privacy, personal choice, as well as personal faith. Too frequently, individuals, organizations, and the media have resorted to inciting outrage and have attributed evil intent to those who may express opposing viewpoints. As a professional society of clinicians and biomedical researchers, we endeavor to engage in critical and constructive debate without resorting to these debasing tactics. Our decisions as a society must remain well-reasoned and principled.

We provide below additional information and rationale that led to our decision:

ISSWSH COVID safety policy for meeting/course attendees

Until further notice, we will be retaining our policy that all meeting attendees must wear face masks and provide either proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test within 3 days prior to arriving at the meeting venue. Whenever possible, we will continue to work with the hotel to implement safe practices that minimize risk for potential viral exposure/transmission.

What is SB8?

The Governor of the state of Texas recently signed into law Senate Bill 8 (SB 8). This law prohibits abortions after detection of fetal cardiac activity and grants private parties the right to bring civil lawsuits against abortion providers and anyone who provides assistance to a person obtaining an abortion. Patients receiving abortions cannot be sued under the new law

but the private parties initiating lawsuits need not have any connection to the person obtaining an abortion and need not live in the state of Texas. This law has already undergone and will likely undergo legal scrutiny and challenges in US courts.

How did ISSWSH choose Dallas?

Meeting sites are chosen well in advance (approximately 18 months) of an annual meeting, taking into consideration travel accessibility, adequacy of facilities, and cost. The decision to hold an Annual Meeting in Dallas was originally made over 2 years ago as the location for our 2021 Annual Meeting. When the 2021 Annual Meeting was held virtually due to the COVID pandemic, ISSWSH was able to minimize the financial losses associated with breaking our contractual obligations with the hotel and conference facility by agreeing to hold our 2022 Annual Meeting in that same location. Cancelling our revised contractual obligations at this late stage and securing an alternative location or even holding another virtual Annual Meeting would place a significant financial burden upon the society, adversely impacting our ability to carry out our mission and to support our membership.

What is our focus as a sexual health society?

In general, societies focusing on sexual health have been intentional to distinguish sexual health from reproductive health. While sexuality and sexual function certainly overlap with reproduction, ISSWSH generally does not address fertility, prenatal care, and abortion, except where they are relevant to or have an impact on sexual function or satisfaction. In addition, while our membership and operations are largely based within the US, we are an **international** society. There are many issues around the world that have adversely impacted women's sexual health, arguably on a much wider scale. Remaining silent on these issues while choosing to advocate a specific position on abortion would be inconsistent and irresponsible.

How much impact does ISSWSH have?

ISSWSH has a fledgling advocacy effort that currently focuses on developing more therapies and for sexual dysfunctions and educating professionals and the public about sexual health conditions and treatments. This is the main focus of our expertise and broadening our efforts would dilute the distinctives of our society and divert significant time, energy, and resources away from our mission. Moving a meeting venue would only be effective if ISSWSH were making a significant economic or legal/political impact with its Annual Meeting. Realistically, the city of Dallas and the state of Texas would not be impacted by ISSWSH moving to another location and we would not change the legal/political landscape in the long-debated issue of abortion. Conversely, the financial impact would be significantly detrimental to ISSWSH with prolonged consequences to the society's operations. If anything, it could be argued that holding our Annual Meeting in Dallas is the most impactful thing that we could do by continuing to discuss and teach about women's sexual health.