

Hope Springs on Virtual Foundations



The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a rapid transition to digital to bridge gaps in service delivery. **Kevin Muirhead** reflects on the future of technology-enabled collective engagement and opportunities for dementia care.

International research conferences provide academics and researchers with the opportunity to share their research and connect with researchers from other countries. For PhD students, attending an international conference is an exciting stage in the PhD journey; it offers a break from routine and an opportunity to explore new destinations and experience different cultures. Students often return home with new knowledge feeling revitalised and inspired.

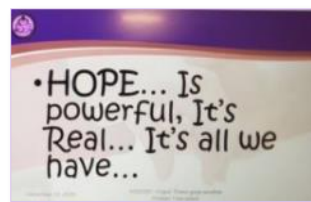
Going Virtual

The Alzheimer Disease International (ADI) conference is one of the longest running international conferences on dementia. The ADI Conference 2020 was due to take place in Singapore in March. Singapore would provide an ideal location for the conference; it is dubbed as the country where 'East meets West' and has a rich cultural diversity that symbolises well the global public health response required to improve the lives of people with dementia. In early 2020, another public health priority of international concern was emerging and ADI 2020 was postponed and repositioned into the virtual space.

Sense of Hope

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on people with dementia who have experienced disproportionately high levels of social isolation, loneliness and mortality. The theme of the conference was 'Hope in The Age of Dementia' which took on greater significance as the dementia community need hope more than ever. The three-day programme

provided assurances that hope remains alive in several presentations of clinical and academic progress towards better prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care, and management of dementia. People living with dementia contributed to a great extent; they valued being partners in research and hoped that their important voices continue to be heard. They hoped to end stigma and hoped to live meaningful lives.



Above: A definition of Hope from ADI 2020¹

Action and Innovation

Enabling people with dementia to maintain (and regain) functional independence can improve quality of life. Monitoring functional change can be valuable as this can lead to early intervention and improved outcomes. The reports of close family members are particularly helpful as self-reports tend to be less accurate². It is in this context that UHI partnered with CogniHealth LTD to develop the Monitor and Track Feature (MTF) within the CogniCare App. MTF enables family carers to record functional and behavioural changes to highlight key trends which are then made accessible to healthcare professionals in detailed reports. ADI 2020 provided an international platform to showcase this unique co-production initiative led by Dr Macaden which demonstrates the

benefits of technological innovation and the power of taking collective action to improve dementia care.



Above: Poster presentation at ADI 2020. Relationship-Centred CogniCare.

Moving Forward

ADI must be commended for their efforts in creating a successful virtual event. The hope and passion of the delegates was palpable and took precedence over the delivery mode. Once the pandemic is over, there will be time to reflect on the benefits and disadvantages of in-person and virtual conferences. Cost-effectiveness, environmental impact, access and equality are likely to be facilitating factors advocated by proponents of virtual. Traditionalists may emphasise the experiential dimensions, networking opportunities and benefits from real life collective engagement. The future conference may integrate the best from both worlds – they need not be mutually exclusive.

1. Taylor D & Taylor E. Plenary 5: Hope springs on solid foundations: Research, innovation, data and information systems. *Alzheimer Disease International Virtual Conference*. 12th December 2020.
2. David A. Loewenstein, Soledad Argüelles, Marina Bravo, Rhonda Q. Freeman, Trinidad Argüelles, Amaris Acevedo, Carl Eisdorfer. Caregivers' Judgments of the Functional Abilities of the Alzheimer's Disease Patient: A Comparison of Proxy Reports and Objective Measures, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, Volume 56, Issue 2, 1 March 2001, Pages P78–P84.