



Demonstrating the flexibility that we have all learnt during the COVID pandemic, the 45th Annual ASSBI Conference was held virtually in Perth, Western Australia. Despite the remoteness of Perth being replicated by the distance between participants the conference brought us all together in a space that engendered collaboration and shared learning.

With a theme “Getting on With the Business of Living” presenters embraced the conference organisers request to provide learnings that support people with brain injury to take back their lives, redefine themselves and identify what for them, is a meaningful purposeful life. Attended by 280 people, delegates provided both diverse discipline representation across both researchers and clinicians and a wide geographical spread. This included international delegates from the UK, France, Norway, Korea and Singapore. Each Australian state was represented, with Victoria having the strongest representation with 80 attendees. Pleasingly the conference hosted 76 people who had never attended before, broadening the exposure of what is always an interesting and enlightening conference.

With a total of 43 oral presentations, 18 data blitz and 5 How To sessions, topics included rehabilitation, dementia, vocation, communication, behaviour and technology representing the broad impact of neurological impairment on people’s lives.

Four distinct workshops were conducted on the Thursday. Workshop one facilitated by Caroline Fisher and Eddie Tsang, “Adult ADHD: Assessment, diagnosis and intervention”, explored clinical features to be aware of and targets of neuropsychological assessment when assessing adults for ADHD. It considered provision of a supportive diagnosis and potential neurocognitive interventions. Workshop two, “Crafting a robust social media strategic plan”, conducted by Professor Bronwyn Hemsley was a delightfully interactive workshop that kept delegates thoroughly engaged for the whole three hours. It supported delegates in developing a personal or social media strategic plan and aimed to increase the safety and enjoyment of health professionals in using social media as a communication intervention with clients. Workshop three, “GAS without tears – finding the right balance for goal setting in rehabilitation” was delivered by Professor Lynne Turner-Stokes remotely from the UK with support from Barby Singer based in Perth. This workshop explored the practical implementation of goal setting in rehabilitation with solutions on how to get the best out of the goal setting process. Workshop four was led by Professors Beth Armstrong and Juli Coffin, “What does culturally secure brain injury care look like for Aboriginal Australians. They discussed the concept of cultural security and explored practical ways of implementing culturally secure practice for Aboriginal people including through organisational policy and procedures, team practices and individual attitudes.

The main conference launched on Friday morning with a full plenary session commencing with a Welcome Country from Kerri Taylor-Colegate a Ballardong/Noongar/Yamatjji woman. Kerri encouraged us to care, nurture and protect one another and to continue to live, learn, work and play to sustain our own spirits and those of others towards a happy and healthy existence. The welcome to country was followed by a robust and entertaining debate on “Machines are the future: in the assessment, diagnosis, rehabilitation and care of those with brain conditions”. We then had the pleasure of listening to Dr Bruce Powell whose lived experience of brain injury gave us insight into the challenges of getting on with the business of living and the importance of learning from and expanding on the research presented at this conference. He also highlighted the importance of us remembering the person at the centre of the research. The session finished with the ASSBI Presidential Address, delivered by Professor Olivier Piguet. Olivier chose to stimulate our thinking with his interestingly titled presentation, “Of monkeys, moonrise, motorbikes and maladies” or Reflexions on primary progressive aphasia. One of his key take home messages which undoubtedly applies to all clinicians working with people with brain impairment is the importance of remaining curious and not ignoring unusual or weird findings.

Day one was rounded off by our two international speakers, Professors Lynne Turner-Stokes and Mathilde Chevignard. Lynne posed questions for us all with her address “Tough decisions around catastrophic brain injury – an international perspective. We were encouraged to consider the decisions we make and support families to make around life sustaining treatment for people in PDOC. Mathilde then gave us insight into the importance of programs for teenagers with brain injury through her presentation “Long-term outcomes and transition to adulthood following childhood acquired brain injury”. She emphasised the diversity of consequences and unpredictability of deficits for these children requiring effective long-term multi-disciplinary follow up.

Day two commenced with our local keynote speakers, Professor Bronwyn Hemsley and Professors Beth Armstrong and Juli Coffin. Bronwyn enlightened us with her talk “People with communication disability striving, thriving

and surviving as technology advances. She emphasised the importance of design inclusive of people with disabilities across all fields, including off the shelf devices, as well as cross discipline collaboration. Juli and Beth presented on "Improving services for Aboriginal Australians after brain injury: Current initiatives and findings to date. They left us with key messages highlighting the importance of Aboriginal researchers leading research and community initiatives not just participating in them, involving Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Aboriginal staff in interventions plus the need for ongoing cultural training for health professionals. They also emphasised the significance of cultural security and respect for cultural protocols. This year's student workshop, coordinated by Danielle Fynn, was a Q&A session *Reconnecting Lives: Overcoming Hurdles in Community Integration after Brain Injury*. The workshop was an informal interactive session with two panel members, Chanel Bowen and Chris Thompson. Chanel is a regional-based screen producer at Synfest Oz and is passionate about community films and delivering Australian content to local audiences. Chanel acquired a brain injury in 2019 has met the challenges of that injury to be able to successfully participate in her career. The second panellist was Chris Thompson who has completed a Masters of Neurological Rehabilitation. Chanel participated in Chris's research on case coordination and community reintegration in South West region of Western Australia. Chris is an advocate for client centred care seeking to promote increased participation of people with disabilities within his work.

The conference concluded with a series of awards that demonstrated both the variety of research presented as well as the high quality of all presenters. Award winners were:-

KEVIN WALSH AWARD

Jeanette Collins for her talk *Adult patient and carer experiences of planning for hospital discharge after a major trauma event* (see below for a report from Jeanette)

LURIA AWARD

Jasvinder Sekhon for her talk *Preliminary efficacy and feasibility of a counselling education program on speech pathologists' self-efficacy and self-rated competency for counselling in post-stroke aphasia*

TRAVEL AWARD

Vanessa Sharp for her talk *Perspectives of Major Traumatic Injury Survivors on Accessibility and Quality of Rehabilitation Services in Rural Australia*

DOUGLAS/TATE AWARD

Suzanne Barker-Collo as lead author on the paper: *Three methods for examining trajectories in neuropsychological performance across the first 4 years after mild Traumatic Brain Injury*

Suzanne Barker-Collo, Alice Theadom, Kelly Jones, Nicola Starkey, Kris Fernando, Michael Kahan, Philip Prah, Valery Feigin
Brain Impairment 2021 Volume 22 Issue 1, pp. 20 - 33

MINDLINK BRIGHTWATER AWARD for interdisciplinary presentation

Meaghan McCallister for her talk *The development and implementation of the Aboriginal Brain Injury Coordinator service as part of the Healing Right Way randomised control trial*

Many states conducted their own individual social events enabling participants to enjoy some face-to-face time within this virtual conference. This included Perth who finished off the conference with a Saturday evening soiree at the Market Grounds in the city, the group from Brisbane who joined us the awards presentation from Barrels and Stills, the Melbourne group met at the Terminus Hotel and the ever-social group from Sydney who, not being able to wait until the conference was finished, partied at a night out on the Thursday evening at the Art Hotel.

Our social media blitz was also record making, blitzing the 2021 conference. We achieved 3.348 million impressions with over 1200 tweets and 100 tweeters. The wonderful @BronwynHemsley did more than her bit for the record, with a few avid supporters a little behind.

The conference organisers are pleased to acknowledge our sponsors including our two Principal Partners, Insurance Commission of WA (ICWA) and the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and our Conference Partners, Summer Foundation and Brightwater Care Group. ICWA, represented by Amber Blake, Senior Communication Officer, presented a West Australian showcase at the Pre Conference event. ICWA provides insurance for almost 2 million West Australian motorists and 125,000 Government workers. ICWA funds the Neurotrauma Research Program which is underpinned by goals of improving quality of life and independence outcomes, offering potential to improve rehabilitation approaches, services and technology and maximising recovery for scheme participants.

ASSBI and the conference Conveners, Michelle Kelly and Janet Wagland, would like to thank the conference organising committee, Pascale Bosboom, Angelita Martini, Barby Singer, Curtis Reddell, Sandy Denison and Danielle Fynn. We would also like to give a big vote of gratitude to our wonderful student helpers who assisted throughout the sessions to keep the conference running smoothly, Aishani Desai, Sammy Moore, Adi Raber, Emily Clements, Jao Carminati, Sarah Carrier and Raj Jayswal. Of course the conference wouldn't have happened at all without the amazing Margaret and Matt Eagers – thanks to them both.

[Michelle Kelly and Janet Wagland](#)