

THE IALH UPDATE

In this issue:

Comonalities Between Two Pandemics

Resources

Opportunities

Upcoming Events

IALH Moves

Commonalities Between Two Pandemics



Photo by Anna Shvets

“Historically, the biomedical aspects of pandemics have been overrepresented, but there is growing recognition of the degree to which pandemics are socially and culturally embedded, highlighting how virus perception is socially and politically informed.”

In a recent study, IALH Research Fellow Ingrid Handlovsky (Nursing), IALH Student Affiliate Anthony Amato (Social Dimensions of Health) and colleagues at Dalhousie University, University of Montreal, and UBC explored the question “How did the HIV/AIDS pandemic shape older gay men’s perspectives of COVID-19?”

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 gay men over the age of 50. Questions focused on the following: describing the most challenging aspects of both the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics and reflecting on commonalities (and differences) between the two. Three key themes emerged: a) uncertainty amidst familiarity; b) witnessing pandemic inequities; and c) navigating constantly evolving (mis) information.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the sense of pandemic familiarity, particularly with respect to isolation. For some participants, having lived through a previous pandemic resulted in diminished fear and/or anxiety, but also emotional challenges associated with memories of uncertainty regarding transmission, illness, and loss. Others communicated a sense of disbelief at being faced with another pandemic during their lifetime.

Participants also contrasted the lack of an “organized public health response in the early days of the HIV/AIDS pandemic” with the “immediate, collective mobilization in the wake of COVID-19”. As the HIV/AIDS pandemic was initially seen as something affecting the gay community, the initial inaction was interpreted as primarily due to politics and discrimination. By contrast, because everyone was potentially susceptible to COVID-19, the response was both coordinated and comprehensive. Several participants expressed anger and frustration at the inequities.

Participants recognized challenges faced by the scientific community with respect to understanding the transmission and effects of a novel virus on human physiology but also highlighted frustrations associated with applying ever-changing knowledge to day-to-day life. They noted that constantly evolving information made it difficult to trust official sources. They also acknowledged that the relatively recent availability of the internet and social media contributed substantially to challenges associated with rapidly evolving information in the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The researchers concluded that “Gay men, having lived through one inherently politicized pandemic, maintain a collective consciousness and subsequent resilience that can be employed to inform public health efforts for future pandemics at the individual and community level...[they] represent an important source of pandemic information and their experiences have much to offer health professionals and policymakers.”

For more information, see <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667321523000173?via%3Dihub>

Resources

Using Data from the CLSA: Understanding Experiences of Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Adults from the CLSA

Stress can take several forms across the life course and is a risk factor for chronic diseases including obesity. Examples of stress include adversity during childhood or exposure to disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also been found that obesity increases the risk of stress and may make people more susceptible to worse experiences during a stressful event like the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsgyBpA08Qo>

Wellness Together Canada

Wellness Together Canada is a free on-line resource that was created in response to increased mental health and substance use concerns due the pandemic. The Wellness Together Canada portal and PocketWell companion app provide free access to peer support, one-on-one counselling with trained health professionals and other mental health and substance use resources.

For more information, go to <https://www.wellnesstogether.ca>

Dementia Talks! Canada

Dementia Talks! Canada is a free on-line discussion series created by the Alzheimer Society of Canada and Brain Canada. Discussion topics cover the latest research on dementia as well as resources and supports for individuals living with dementia. A question and answer period occurs at the end of each session, and any unanswered questions are addressed via email. Previous topics have explored: concussions, brain injuries and dementia; art and dementia; young onset dementia; dementia and technologies; and creating dementia-friendly spaces.

For more information, go to <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/dementia-resources/dementia-talks-canada>

Opportunities

A Hot Topic Survey

Of the 619 deaths linked to the extreme heat dome in 2021, most were of older adults living with chronic illness. UVic researcher Dr. Sarah Wiebe is collaborating with the CRD to amplify the stories of people who experienced negative health impacts of extreme heat and help service providers and governments understand the best ways to help before, during and after extreme heat events.

The research team is looking for individuals to participate in a 15-20 minute survey. They are particularly looking for participants within the following categories:

- Demographics (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, people with disabilities)
- Work (e.g., outsider workers)
- Living situation (e.g., isolated, high apartment tower)

To participate in the survey, visit <https://redcap.link/ahottopiccrd> or contact feelingtheheatresearch@gmail.com. Participants will be entered to win a \$50 gift certificate.

Upcoming Events

CRC Talks: Powerful, Transformative Voices: Creative arts methods promote Indigenous end-of-life experiences

April 26, 2023, 10:30 am – noon, online via Zoom

Producing stories about Indigenous peoples' end-of-life cultural needs and preferences by Indigenous peoples, for Indigenous peoples, is an empowering and transformative research approach. Led by Dr. Tess Moeke-Maxwell, this discussion will describe how the Te Ārai Palliative Care and End of Life Research Group collaborates with Indigenous families using Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR) methods and creative arts methods, to empower them to share their stories about their end-of-life care experiences and customs. This information is needed to support culturally disenfranchised families.

About the speaker: Dr. Tess Moeke-Maxwell, PhD (Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki & Ngāti Porou) is a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Nursing at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is also the co-director of the Te Ārai Palliative Care and End of Life Research Group.

This CRC talk is presented by the [Palliative Approaches to Care in Aging and Community Health](#) group, led by IALH Research Fellow, Dr. Kelli Stajduhar.

To join the presentation, visit <https://uvic.zoom.us/j/85311532967#success>.

The Beautiful Mind

April 27, 2023, 6:00 – 9:00 pm, in-person (Medical Sciences Building) or via Zoom

This TEDx-style event will feature three researchers working with IALH Research Fellow Marie-Éve Tremblay in the Division of Medical Sciences: Fernando González Ibáñez, Haley Vecchiarelli, and Adriano Maia Chaves Filho. Through short, fun, and easy-to-understand presentations, the researchers will introduce the audience to microglia, the brains' resident immune cells. They'll explain how these immune cells can affect physical and mental health, as well as link to some of society's most pressing issues.

For more information or to obtain free tickets, go to <https://events.uvic.ca/medsci/event/73434-the-beautiful-mind>.

Engineered Human Brain Models Uncover ER (Endoplasmic Reticulum) Stress as a Driver of Neurodevelopmental Cortical Malformations

April 28, 2023, 1:00 pm, Medical Sciences Building, Room 150

Dr. Lisa Julian, Assistant Professor in Stem Cell Biology and Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Developmental Origins of Stem Cell Fate, Department of Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University

Neural stem cells build the brain through orchestrated fate decisions that generate all specialized neural cell types. Altered neural stem cell fate regulation can cause neurodevelopmental disorders. Dr. Julian's lab focuses on 1) engineering human cell and tissue models of the developing brain using pluripotent stem cells, and 2) exploiting these models to understand how alterations in neural stem cell fate decisions impact brain form and function. She will discuss efforts to produce a human model of the primary cell types and heterogenous tissues that underly cortical malformations in the epilepsy and cognitive syndrome tuberous sclerosis. She will highlight a discovery using these models and genomic, metabolic, and live cell imaging approaches, of a profound cell stress and organelle signaling response that underlies aberrant neural cell development in tuberous sclerosis. These findings are deepening understanding of normal brain development and pathology underlying neurodevelopmental disorders like tuberous sclerosis.

Engaging the Community Sector in Research on Aging

May 4, 2023 7:00 am -12:00 noon Pacific, hybrid

This session, which is hosted by engAGE: Centre for Research on Aging at Concordia University will focus on the essential role that community organizations (such as Victoria-based Seniors Serving Seniors and James Bay New Horizons) play in supporting older individuals. Researchers, students, representatives from non-profit organizations, policy makers, and community members are invited to attend.

For more information or to register, go to <https://www.concordia.ca/cuevents/offices/vprgs/engage/2023/05/04/engaging-the-community-sector-in-research-on-aging.html>.

#IALHMoves

with Mar'yana Fisher - Aerobics Enthusiast

// I feel **strong, energetic,**
and flexible //

Mar'yana Fisher is a doctoral student in Nursing and an IALH Student Affiliate. She is also a licensed aerobics instructor. Between focusing on her doctoral research and raising her children, Mar'yana still makes the time to schedule physical activity into her daily routine.

How did you get started in this activity?

As a teenager, I aspired to take good care of my body and mind, and maintain my well-being. This resolve, in part, was inspired by my observations of the effects that poor health choices had on my peers. So, I joined aerobics classes in the local community centre and attended three times a week. After a year, I trained for and received an instructor license.

How long have you been doing this activity and what changes have you noticed over time?

I have been enjoying aerobics since I was sixteen years old. Over the years, I diversified my fitness interests and included various outdoor and indoor activities such as Tabata, High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), jogging, speed-walking, and biking.

The cumulative effect of routine exercising continues to impress me beyond my initial expectations. At 39, I feel strong, energetic, and flexible. Getting outside and engaging in fitness, whether aerobics or walking on the beach, elevates my mood, reduces anxiety, and improves my coping stamina. Exercise is my meditation and prayer. Another surprising and rewarding "side-effect" of physical activity is a healthy skin glow!

What helps you to stay motivated to keep doing this activity?

If the glow mentioned above is not convincing enough, I will say this: the feeling of self-care, pampering and deep holistic connection with self motivates me to engage in one hour of aerobics 3 to 4 times a week. On other days of the week, I experiment with various physical activities to prevent boredom and work out different muscle groups.

Where is your favourite local place to do (or train for) this activity?

I live in Ladner, BC, and my two favorite places to do aerobics are my backyard and Centennial Beach.

What challenges do you face trying to maintain or fit this activity into your daily routine?

I have two big challenges when maintaining a daily exercise routine: weather and life. When the weather is particularly inclement, I work out indoors, but then scheduling gym classes and getting to the gym after work requires careful time management and balancing other demands on my time. Also, life has a way of getting in the way of perfectly laid-out plans.

How do you overcome this challenge?

I've learned to be flexible and to abandon the "all or nothing" mindset. If I can't get the ideal workout that I intended for the day, I will still engage in some sort of exercise, whether it's walking my dog, doing crunches in front of the TV, or wrestling with my boys. And in the following days, I add extra rigor to my perfect workout when it happens.

What advice would you offer to someone who would like to try or is just starting out in this activity?

1. Join a group! Everything is more fun with good company.
2. Listen to your body! Daily exercise is a life-long journey, not a sprint!

