Corresponding author:
La correspondance et les demandes de tirés-à-part doivent être adressées à : / Correspondence and requests for offprints should be sent to: Brad Meisner, Ph.D., School of Kinesiology & Health Science, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3J 1P3 (meisnerb@yorku.ca)

Hindsight 20/20: Looking Back for a Vision Forward in Gerontology

Brad A. Meisner[1,2]

[1]CAG2021 Conference Chair, Canadian Association on Gerontology and [2]School of Kinesiology & Health Science, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

This article contains excerpts from the opening and closing remarks delivered at CAG2021 – the Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting of the Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) – which was hosted virtually from October 21 to 23, 2021. This event commemorated CAG's 50th anniversary and included 645 delegates from across Canada and the world. The conference theme, "Hindsight 20/20: Looking Back for a Vision Forward in Gerontology," focused on the burgeoning gerontological work that examines the various and complex ways that COVID-19 has affected older people and aging, as well as the need to develop a stronger emphasis on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the field of gerontology.

Opening Remarks

On behalf of the Conference Committee and the Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to welcome you to CAG's 50th Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting — CAG2021. As you know, we were hoping to meet in person this year in Toronto, but the ongoing circumstances of the pandemic required us to transition to a virtual delivery format. In that transition, we very much appreciated your patience as we navigated the changing conditions of COVID-19 and the migration to an online space for us to meet. During this time, the Conference Committee worked with CAG and CanPlan Event & Conference Services to bring you an excellent program of cutting-edge research and learning opportunities in gerontology.

Land Acknowledgment

As we are on a virtual platform and located across Canada and around the world, we acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of all the lands that we are on today. In Toronto, where CAG's main office is located and where I am now, we acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. This land acknowledgment affirms our responsibility for improving our own understandings of local Indigenous peoples and cultures, and our commitments to achieving truth and reconciliation.

Conference Theme

This year's conference theme is "Hindsight 20/20: Looking Back for a Vision Forward in Gerontology," which was chosen for three main reasons. First, to recognize that CAG's 2020 conference, originally scheduled last October in Regina, Saskatchewan, was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there were missed opportunities for us to come together to share our work and interests in gerontology, which is likely why many of us are very excited to be back together this year even in a virtual space.

Second, since 2020, so much has happened. Events that have taken place in the last 19 months have been both surreal and seismic. The pandemic disrupted daily life for Canadians and citizens around the globe, and, although COVID-19 affected us all, arguably, older adults were among those affected the most by the many impacts of the pandemic – particularly those in long-term care settings, some of whom continue to be impacted there – not only biomedically because of risks associated with the virus, but also psychologically and socially because of the conditions that were created by the pandemic response. At the same time, we also saw that marginalized groups and communities were disproportionately affected by the harms of the COVID-19 pandemic. These effects coincided with publicized incidents of racialized violence, such as the murder of

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

George Floyd and the discovery of more than 1,000 unmarked graves of Indigenous children at residential school sites across Canada. These traumatic events disrupted cultural and political life in 2020, and into 2021, to expose long-standing structural systems of oppression that disadvantage marginalized groups and communities, which include older people, on a wide and undeniable scale.

There are lessons to learn from these social events and the pandemic for developing the field of gerontology. More specifically, there is a greater need for a more intentional focus on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in research, practice, and policy in terms of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity as well as gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, and more – in addition to, and in combination with, age. There is a need for a greater use of anti-oppressive and intersectional approaches in gerontological work for us to address issues of ageism as well as racism, colonialism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism and homophobia, and other forms of marginalization that impact older people across Canada and the world. CAG2021 was developed with these goals in mind.

The third reason why the conference theme is "Hindsight 20/20: Looking Back for a Vision Forward in Gerontology" is that this year also commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Canadian Association on Gerontology. Although a virtual conference is certainly not how we envisioned celebrating CAG's semicentennial, we nonetheless want to recognize the association's 50-year history and the contributions that it has made as the leading national multi-disciplinary organization on matters relating to older adults and aging in Canada. For example, the joint statement released by CAG and the *Canadian Journal on Aging* on the need for interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches in the response to COVID-19 has been used by the World Health Organization in pandemic-related policy. Also, on behalf of CAG, the *Canadian Journal on Aging* has published a special issue on "COVID-19 and Aging in Canada" to follow that joint statement.

Conference Activities Overview

Now let us turn to what we can expect over the next three days. The conference program includes an impressive collection of more than 500 oral, poster, and symposium presentations as well as workshops given by delegates from across Canada and the world. Throughout the conference, we will hear from leading and emerging experts in gerontology, representing multiple disciplines including the social, health, and biomedical sciences; psychology; the humanities; social policy and practice; and educational gerontology.

We are also honoured to have three internationally renowned keynote speakers who will address interdisciplinary topics in gerontology that focus specifically on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The first keynote will be given by Dr. Margaret Morganroth Gullette who will present her pioneering work called, "Shocked, But Not Surprised: Ageism and Eldercide in the COVID-19 Era." Tomorrow, Dr. Lisa Barnes will describe her award-winning program of research on racial disparities in neurocognition among older African American adults in her presentation titled, "The Importance of Centering Diversity in Clinical Alzheimer's Research." On Saturday, the last keynote will be given by Lisa Krinsky who is a social worker and an expert on cultural competency and community engagement of older adults who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual. She will discuss her work at the Fenway Institute in her presentation, "LGBTQIA+ Older Adults: Understanding Our Past and Creating Our Future."

Thank Yous

On behalf of the Conference Committee, I want to take a moment to recognize those who have supported us in our efforts to develop this enriching and productive event. First, I thank Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, the Governor General of Canada, for her thoughtful letter and warm words of welcome to CAG2021 as well as her recognition of CAG's 50th anniversary and the contributions that the association has made during its first 50 years.

I would also like to thank the three keynote speakers, Dr. Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Dr. Lisa Barnes, and Lisa Krinsky, for sharing their work and ideas with us on such important topics that cut across different areas of gerontology. We hope that these keynote presentations inspire a greater and more intentional focus on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in gerontology in Canada, and motivate us to engage in interdisciplinary and collaborative work – even more than we already do as demonstrated at CAG2021.

I would also like to thank the sponsors of CAG2021, including the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Aging, our supporting partner, for providing excellent opportunities for students and trainees in gerontology at CAG2021, including a pre-conference workshop, and for funding the poster competition awards. Congratulations again to the masters, doctoral, and postdoctoral award winners. I also want to acknowledge another pre-conference event sponsor, the Canadian Institute for Seniors Care at Conestoga College; our workshop session sponsor, Home Instead; and Cambridge University Press, the publishers of the *Canadian Journal on Aging*, for sponsoring the virtual poster hall. CAG2021 was also supported by funding received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

I want to thank Dr. Veronique Boscart, CAG President, and the CAG divisional chairs who supported the abstract review process, as well as the many volunteers who reviewed the abstracts. I also thank CAG's Legacy Fund Committee for sponsoring the student members' registration fees to attend this event and for supporting a keynote speaker.

I extend a sincere thanks to Dr. Anthony Lombardo, Executive Director of CAG, as well as to Patricia Pearson and the rest of the CanPlan Event & Conference Services team for their dedication to the many administrative and technological components of online conference planning that allowed us to meet over the past three days.

Finally, this conference would not have been possible or as successful without the attendees. I thank all of you for participating in CAG2021 and for sharing your work and interests in gerontology with others. Thank you all for being here to commemorate CAG's 50th anniversary as well – the celebrations will continue.

Closing Remarks

So, CAG2021 has come to an end. Keeping in mind the conference theme, "Hindsight 20/20: Looking Back for a Vision Forward in Gerontology," it was remarkable to learn about the work being done in Canada and abroad, which carefully examines the various ways that COVID-19 has affected, and continues to affect, older people and aging. Also, it is optimistic to see the different ways that

justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are being considered in some of this work, which is vital to addressing the marginalization of different social groups of older adults, which was magnified by the pandemic.

On behalf of Conference Committee, as well as Dr. Veronique Boscart, CAG President, and the rest of the CAG Board, we truly hope that this virtual knowledge exchange was informative, thought provoking, and useful to your current and future pursuits in gerontology. We also hope that this conference will foster interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral collaborations that aim to include, represent, and more equitably respond to the wants and needs of diverse groups within Canada's aging population.