



## **Report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krems Dementia Conference 2020 VIRTUAL**

**(16 – 18 Nov 2020)**

There are about 50 million people with dementia living worldwide and according to the WHO, this number will triple up to 2050. In 2014, the global costs of dementia were estimated to be around 800 billion dollars (Wortmann, 2014) and recent calculations showed that dementia will be the most expensive chronic disease in the next years (Economics, 2009). Hence, research on concepts and ideas for the early detection and prevention of dementia is as crucial as the interdisciplinary and internationally exchange of these ideas. The aim of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krems Dementia Conference (16 – 18 Nov 2020), which was organized by Prof. Stefanie Auer and Marc Wortmann, was therefore to bring together researchers and policy makers as well as persons with dementia and their relatives in order to present and discuss the latest research and preventive strategies. About 300 attendees from 15 countries followed this invitation and joined the conference, which was, due to the current COVID-19 situation, transferred to an online format. Over the three days, they had the possibility to listen to about 40 talks and to join two additional workshops on various topics.

On Day 1 of the conference, two leading experts, namely Prof. Myrra Vernooij Dassen from the Radboud University (The Netherlands) and Prof. Mary Mittelman from the New York University (USA) were invited as keynote speakers. Prof. Vernooij Dassen spoke about dementia prevention and social health and emphasized the importance of social engagement as one of the most important factors against dementia. Mary Mittelman presented a program which she has developed at New York University and which is addressed to the relatives of persons with dementia. This program has been shown to successfully delay the institutionalization rates for people with dementia. Besides the two researchers, Felizitas Maurer and Helga Rohra as representatives for informal caregivers and for persons concerned, respectively, took the opportunity to speak about their experiences and needs.

On the second day, topics such as awareness building, and diagnosis of dementia were in the focus. For instance, in the first session of the day, a project plan for the installation of dementia-friendly libraries in Lower Austria was introduced and the progress of two further projects that aim to establish dementia-friendly police as well as communities in Austria was presented. These latter projects are located in the center for dementia studies at the Danube University Krems under the lead of Prof. Stefanie Auer and conducted in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Regarding a timely diagnosis and the long-term accompaniment of people with dementia, an initiative from upper Austria was presented that provides 11 dementia service centers in order to support persons with dementia and their relatives. In a talk that was addressed to the economic analysis of these centers, the findings revealed that that these centers are very cost-effective as they delay the progress of the dementia and therefore the costs that come along with later stages.

Timely diagnosis was the main topic in the keynote of Prof. Wiesje van der Flier (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands) who emphasized its importance as many treatments are less effective in the later stages of dementia. In a further keynote, Prof. Michael Brainin from the Danube University Krems presented a groundbreaking project that aims to reduce stroke cases by half by providing specific prevention strategies which also may be related to dementia. In her keynote, Debra Morgan from the University of Saskatchewan (Canada) gave information about her experiences in supporting persons with

dementia and their relatives in rural environments. Finally, Dr. Sören Mattke (University of California, Los Angeles) spoke about the challenge that governments and health systems might face in the future as they are still inadequately prepared to offer modifying treatments to people with dementia once they become available.

On the final day of the conference, challenges and effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic on people with dementia and their (in)formal caregivers were discussed. Prof. Debby Gerritsen from the Radboud University (The Netherlands) presented findings from a study conducted in nursing homes in The Netherlands. While in some nursing homes an increase in challenging behavior in people with dementia was observed because of the restrictions, in other homes even a positive effect of a “calming down” in the wards was reported. However, the results also showed a decline in the job satisfaction in the care team over time and an increase in workload. Prof. Iva Holmerová (Charles University Prague, Czech Republic), current chair of Alzheimer Europe, emphasized the importance of a correct diagnosis of delirium, because in context of COVID-19, delirium triggered by COVID-19 has been very often incorrectly diagnosed as dementia and treated accordingly.

In a symposium, dementia plans from different countries such as Austria, Germany, Greece and Bosnia-Herzegovina were presented and discussed and in a further session, various initiatives from different countries for awareness building presented. The aim of these projects was to increase awareness in the society for dementia.

Besides the main program, also two workshops were provided (AIDEM 2020, Biogen Workshop to increase awareness) and well received by the attendees. Moreover, poster-presentation among some entertainment program were provided at the conference homepage ([www.donau-uni.ac/dementia-conference](http://www.donau-uni.ac/dementia-conference)). Also, all abstracts can be found on the website. The next Krems Dementia Conference is scheduled for the 28.-30. October 2021.

An evaluation study conducted online after the end of the conference among the attendees confirmed the success of the conference. Eighty-four participants filled in the questionnaire. Most of them (63,4 %) worked in the health sector (e.g., clinical psychology, nursing, physiotherapy), about 19.7% were researchers, 9.9 % students and about 7 % were people with dementia or relatives. About 90% of the attendees rated the conference as

„excellent“ or „very good“; about 10 as „average“ or “fair” (the most often mention point of criticism was the online-format of the conference which also reduced the possibility of social interaction among the attendees). The quality of talks and posters was rated well by all participants and about 97% stated that the conference was a good possibility to get informed about the latest research. Therefore, about 94% stated that they would recommend the conference to their colleagues.