

REPORT OF THE 2019 AGM & CONFERENCE OF CURAC

“TO IMPROVE LIFE”

Reported by John Meyer, substitute delegate of WURA, May, 2019

It was my pleasure to be able to attend and now to express my appreciation for the support from the funding from WURA & WUFA. A bonus to participation in the excellent sessions was the opportunity to associate with a very few colleagues with whom I had served on the CURAC Board over a 6 year period including 2 years as its President. The occasion was so very well organized by the UGuelph retirees association and subsequently reported on the curac.ca website. Curac has made considerable improvements in the areas of communication, news letters, briefs on health and pensions, and affinity partner benefits. When I first saw the program descriptions, I was somewhat sceptical of the relationship of the topics to retirees but once present in session I quickly learned of the positive value of these topics. Now so much detail and in several cases the entire presentation in power point or video style are available in the **Summer Newsletter** on the **www.curac.ca** website. A PDF link is also on our **wura website**.

Session Round table Discussions: “Ideas that Matter”: The annual practice of obtaining advice from RAs = retirees associations to curac Board and revealing best practices of RAs was conducted at round table (10 members per table) with prepared questions. Main issues expressed: incentives to recruit volunteers (fees & benefits); successful activities= informative presentations, excursions, lack of communication to members within RAs, socials, and RAs & Curac benefits. I noted that the structure of this activity was deficient with too many reps at too few tables resulting in restricted participation & dominance of a few. Windsor was much more advanced in what it offers and offers. UBC has now joined UT in the creation of a “Retirees Academy”.

Session “Can we use bugs as drugs?” by Emma Allen-Vercoe, Prof. Molecular/Cellular Biology:

- 200-500 diverse bacteria species in our guts that are essential and should provide a delicate balance between we the host and the microbiome.
- Research is not telling us to AVOID a too clean environment & let nature assist in the development of our immune systems especially in the first 3 years of life
- Lesson: AVOID - highly processed foods low in fibre, complex carbohydrates, artificial sweeteners, colours, emulsifiers, repeated antibiotic use, and probiotics.

- Reduced biodiversity has led to increasing rates of some 12 negative health conditions
- Treatment with a “robo-gut” bioreactor for the large intestine is promising the trial phase for microbial ecosystem therapeutics & available commercially in a few years.

Session “Agri-food for Human Health” by Alison Duncan, Prof. Human Health & Nutritional Sciences:

- “functional foods” can benefit older adults and prevent chronic disease, e.g., enriched omega-3 eggs, plant-sterol-margarines, and psyllium cereals.
- Duncan’s research includes a group using bread made from soybeans, spearmint tea high in antioxidants, lentils combined with rice
- Guelph & Waterloo have produced a Recipe Resource for Healthy Aging and a Bean Toolkit for older adults

Session “Feeding the future: climate change, population growth and technology”
Evan Fraser, Director, Arrell Food Institute; UGuelph Dept. Geography, Environment & Geomatics

- Feeding 9 billion people while coping with climate change is the Grand Challenge of 21st century
- Producing more food plus equity food distribution, types of foods produced, reducing food waste, food prices, and adjusting to climate changes are ALL factors to be addressed.
- The digital agri revolution will shape every aspect of our food system, e.g., tractors with data & AT to apply water, pesticides, fertilizers; robots; new protein food products.
- We can be **cautiously realistic** since the revolution has started but timing of impacts unknown.

Session Sexuality and Aging: the Final Frontier by Tuuli Kukkonen, Director of Psychophysiology of Sexual Health Lab, Dept. Of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition:

- Sexual Activity & satisfaction in later life is important for mental & physical health, for relationship, for happiness, and for general life satisfaction.
- Minimal research indicates that an arthritic condition will decrease interest, blood flow, endurance, sense of attractiveness, and satisfaction and may increase sensitivity to touch.
- Optimal sexual activity should include: authenticity, connection, fully present, exploration and risk, vulnerability, transcendence and extraordinary communication.
- Nursing homes often pose barriers for older adults, e.g., negative staff attitudes, lack of staff education, lack of privacy, lack of opportunity or a partner, the ethical injunction or family bias of the resident.
- Research stats indicate that there is an increase in sexually transmitted diseases among those who are sexually active and use no protections when appropriate.

Session “Aging Well and Age-Friendly Communities” by panelists = L.Briggs, Phil Alit, Manon Germain, Maryanne Wilford (all from the City of Guelph’s Age Friendly WHO project):

- ◆ The City of Guelph undertook and achieved (2014-2018) the strategic plan of the World Health Organization and in conjunction with other city services, e.g., a City Counsellor, Planning Dept., Senior Centre, and an independent Consultant. The purpose of this project is to provide a safe, inclusive living environments for seniors to stay active, age well, and get engaged with the community services.
- ◆ The needs and benefits of age friendly initiatives were explored and a challenge was made for retirees to advocate and get engaged in such projects.
- ◆ I was reminded that Windsor has also been certified as an Age-Friendly Community by WHO and continues to challenge the City and others to implement the elements of the strategy.

Session Have your retirement plans gone to the dogs? Perhaps they should!

Rep. Of the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program.

- ❖ The benefits of dog ownership on individual health and wellness
- ❖ The nature of dog therapy (TD), how to become a member of a program
- ❖ An opportunity to meet and interact with TD owners and their pets afterwards
- ❖ In collaboration with Ontario Veterinary College, UGuelph Pet Trust to advance vet medicine

Session **“Collecting the Past for the Future”** Head of Archives Kathryn Harvey, presented in the library archival area a very informative report on the exceptional primary social/cultural collections:

- rural heritage from 1874 OAC + Massey-Harris-Ferguson & Int. Harvester records.
- Culinary history (18,000+ cookbooks & personal collections of Jean Pare & Edna Staebler)
- Theatre archives of L.W.Conolly (Shaw) and of William Hutt, J. Thompson, C. Newton
- Scottish studies- largest collection in world outside the U.K.
- Lucy Maud Montgomery collection - a national treasure of her writings & dolls