

EHPS Bratislava Conference 2023

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It was with some trepidation I attended the EHPS Conference in Bratislava. Although I was extremely grateful and appreciative for the support that enabled me to attend, as a clinician entering a health psychologist's domain, I was filled with feelings of imposter syndrome. Would I understand what was going on? Would I be lost in an ocean of complex theoretical frameworks and impenetrable mechanistic work? And what of my own presentation, would it be too simplistic? Fortunately, my concerns soon abated as I found myself in the swathes of a busy, but extremely informative and useful conference. One, which in retrospect, had a substantial impact upon my current and future research.

My work as a pre-doctoral student examines the use of behavioural science-informed interventions in screening programmes, especially amongst underserved groups. As a result, I was soon in familiar territory, attending one of my conference highlights: a symposium on cancer screening participation during the first day. Key to asymptomatic screening is the preservation of informed choice. From my own experience, there can often be concern from members of the public and screening programme commissioners regarding potential coercion by behavioural interventions in this context. It was therefore very interesting to hear Maren Reder's (Universität Hildesheim, Germany) presentation on how knowledge and attitude mediate the effect of a decision aid on informed choice, and uptake intention of

mammography (Reder, 2022). Furthermore, a talk by Professor Katie Robb (University of Glasgow, UK) on the Integrated Screening Action Model (I-SAM) and its applications in two trials, led me to reflect upon my own work (Robb, 2022). It gave me insights into the use of novel frameworks for intervention development specific to screening, the need to appreciate the "screening behaviour process" and how this can be applied to develop targeted approaches. This was further highlighted by Marie Kotzur (University of Glasgow, UK), who presented her experiences on how to adapt research methodology to be inclusive of people of all abilities (Kotzur & Jamieson, 2022). Given the stark health inequalities seen within screening services, modifying research to make it more accessible is essential. Seeing how this could be achieved practically with simple aids was eye-opening and provided me with an impetus to use and share these approaches.

Boosted by a sense of enthusiasm and a newfound confidence from the first day, I spent much of the rest of the conference venturing out of my niche and exploring the many fascinating developments in health psychology. A symposium on the Behaviour Change Intervention Ontology was extremely stimulating (Michie, et al. 2020). It highlighted the novel ways of describing and connecting behavioural change entities that are being developed. This means of evaluation encourages a more in-depth understanding of individual behavioural interventions, as well as facilitating cross-discipline comparisons. Moreover, a presentation by Professor Janna Hastings (University of Zurich, Switzerland), suggested that

with advances in natural language processing and interpretable machine learning, there is the exciting potential to make algorithmic predictions about behavioural change interventions (Hastings, 2022). Given the numbers of screening interventions of varying effectiveness I have encountered in the literature, having an ability to predict what might work would be invaluable.

The roundtable on how to reduce social inequalities in digital health promotion was also illuminating. With growing numbers of digital change behavioural interventions, and concerns regarding the second and third level digital divides, the discussion was enthusiastic. Upon sharing experiences with other researchers it was clear to see that the difficulty in overcoming these challenges was ubiquitous. Hearing others explain the problems they had encountered, and potential approaches to address digital exclusion gave me food for thought. The group sessions have now led me to explore a new research theme, and offered the opportunity for new collaborations.

Despite initial anxieties, attending the EHPS conference was an extremely positive experience. Not only did I manage to present my work, and gain validation from the wider health psychology community, it helped set the direction for my future research. Inspired by the work of some esteemed colleagues, who were more than willing to share their experiences, I have broadened my research interests. In addition, I left the conference having networked with several aspiring young researchers, who I hope to work with in the future. More importantly, it has helped solidify my decision to continue to pursue academia in conjunction with my clinical work. As I now enter the final stages of my thesis, I feel invigorated and keen to apply some of the things I have learnt into practice. I would like to thank the EHPS Grants Committee for this great opportunity, and all those involved with the conference for making it such a fantastic experience. I hope to see you again in Bremen!

References

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