

Re: APF Grant for American Thoracic Society Virtual Congress

I think it is fair to say that 2020 has been a less than conventional year! Unfortunately, this unique situation we have found ourselves in has not spared the world of academia either. Normally, specialists in respiratory medicine would meet for the annual American Thoracic Society conference; to discuss ongoing challenges we face, meet old friends and new acquaintances and plan for future trials, projects, and ways to improve the lives of people living with pulmonary diseases, like IPF.

However, this year, many conferences have moved online, still allowing researchers and clinicians from around the world to present their work, and catch up with the latest developments in the field. The American Thoracic Society meeting was supposed to be in-person in May 2020, but ended up being online in the autumn 2020. Thus, instead of finding myself in Philadelphia – Rocky Balboa's hometown, the 'City of Brotherly Love' and world-famous cheesesteak sandwiches – I found myself in my spare bedroom, coffee in hand, with the neighbours dog staring at me through the window.

I was fortunate to be able to share my research, in a poster-format, on *Aerobic fitness, but not breathlessness is associated with physical activity status in Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis*. As an exercise scientist by training, I am excited to see how physical activity, and pulmonary rehabilitation, can be effectively used to enhance fitness and quality of life in people with chronic disease. This work shows that the amount of 'normal' activity someone with IPF does (walking to shops, gardening, being at work) is linked to their cardiovascular fitness, but not their level of breathlessness. This has important implications for how we prescribe activity, and how breathlessness is managed in IPF, and is something we intend to research further.

Many presentations I was intrigued by had adopted home-based, or virtual-delivery of pulmonary rehabilitation classes, showing this process to be safe, cost effective and just as medically effective as hospital based programmes; particularly when carers at home also joined in with the classes. With COVID on our doorstep for a while to come, and many hospitals pausing their pulmonary rehabilitation classes, this was useful to know for clinical practice.

This style of conference had many advantages, particularly the 'on demand' nature of the posters and many talks. This meant I was able to access them at any time I wished, and could see and read everything I wanted, without having to miss some conflicting sessions – an unfortunate occurrence with 'regular' conferences. Attendance at this conference, whilst unconventional, was still invaluable, and was a unique experience that has genuinely helped me in my academic development.

For their continued support, I must thank Action for Pulmonary Fibrosis, who have generously financed my attendance to the 2020 American Thoracic Society meeting.

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