

[Sarai]

All righty then. Hello everyone and welcome to our final discussion session of MINDS 2021 titled "mental health during and beyond the pandemic". I am Sarai Guerrero and I will be the chair for the session which is starting now. Before we get started, I would like to thank the speakers and you the audience for your attendance and participation today. This conference couldn't have been made without you! So just some session guidelines. Feel free to turn on your video but keep in mind that you'll need to keep your microphone muted during the course of the session. As well as the image shown here to show you how to turn on and off your live transcript/captioning if it is required. We will be recording and streaming the sessions and stop for the last part around 10 minutes or so to be unrecorded for audience questions and Q&A. We are not... We also want to put in the general warning that there are trigger warnings, as sensitive subjects may be discussed and we are not a healthcare professional nor do we provide counseling or therapy. You can visit the resource page on the MINDSinacademia website to refer and collect to refer to collected resources that might be able to help you. We ask that you remain respectful of others. Inappropriate behavior or comments will not be tolerated and may result in your removal from the conference. If you need help during the session, please contact IT in Zoom or in Zoom or email the MINDS conference at minds.conference@gmail.com. Enter questions into the chat and when we get to the Q&A, I will be asking them to the speakers on your behalf. All right, so our speakers are now going to be allowed to spend some time giving a presentation. Is there a preference on which one of you would like to go first?

Oh wait, I forgot bios. I forgot the bios, my apologies. That was really rude. There are bios for me to read, so how can we go on without knowing who our speakers are? So first we have Dr. Evelyne who is a Biophysical and Computational Chemist. She obtained her PhD in Computational Biophysics from the University of Western in 2012. After a few years of postdocing, she is now a Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensland. The research in her lab combines computer simulations and biophysical chemistry to understand how small molecules interact with biological membranes. She is passionate about supporting diversity and equity in STEM and is teaching the next generation of scientists to be critical thinkers.

Our second speaker is Dr. Neda, who is a fifth year PhD candidate at the Institute of Medicine at the University of Toronto and her research focus is on investigating structural and functional MRI scans in the population at risk of Alzheimer's dementia. She has received the Alzheimer's society research program award doctorate award for her studies. Neda holds a medical doctorate from Tehran University of Medical Science and a master's degree in cognitive neuroscience from Trento University, Italy, and the Donders Institute, the Netherlands. Neda is the co-founder and executive director of the IMS international community group. All right batman bullseye, now which one of the speakers would like to go first with their presentation?

[Neda]

Thank you for the introduction, Sarai. Mine was a long introduction.

[Evelyne]

Are you okay if I go first either, Neda?

[Neda]

Yeah sure yeah go ahead please

[Evelyne]

I think my talk might sort of lead into what you, when I saw your slides, so let me share my screen now. Hopefully, the technology works. You should be able to see the slides, thank you Aleksandra. Well, welcome everyone! Yes and thanks for the introduction, Sarai. My name is Evelyn Deplazes and I am at the University of Queensland in Brisbane in Australia and thanks very much for the organizers of the conference to invite me. This is actually my first time that I'm sort of publicly talking about things related to academic mental health. I've been quite active about it on Twitter, since I only recently joined Twitter about six months ago, but this is the first time I'm actually talking at an event about it. So, I first like to start with what we traditionally do in our institution in Australia is to acknowledge the traditional owners of the country that I reside on at the moment and I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and their custodianship of the lands of which I'm meeting you today, which is the Turrbal and Yuggera people. I pay my respects to their ancestors and their descendants and who continue to be the cultural and spiritual connections to the country. We recognize their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

So, a bit about me and then I did something, you probably should never do is... I googled myself. I google imaged my name and it was actually quite interesting, because what came up is not a bad representation, I suppose, of where I'm at at the moment. So on the left, you can see, as I said, I'm a Biophysical and Computational Chemist. I got my PhD from the University of Western Australia in 2012. I then did a traditional post-doc for a few while, and then over the last few years, I slowly transitioned into becoming a PI. And, I was very fortunate that I'm one of the few fortunate ones that actually landed a position as a Senior Lecturer. Just recently, so I've, 10 weeks ago or 12 weeks ago, I moved from University of Technology, Sydney to the University of Queensland, here in Brisbane to start my position as a senior lecturer and I'm at the moment in the process of building up my lab here, while my small group still is in Sydney, unfortunately in lockdown at the moment. And so but I've also been very, always been a very big advocate and open about diversity and inclusion in STEM and at the start this was very much focused on gender equity and women in STEM, and more recently it's been more broader about diversity and inclusion, so that everyone can thrive in academia in STEM or my particular case STEM. And on the very right side, you can see I'm also a very passionate traveler, well before COVID and I'm a yogi. So yoga both the physical, and mental, and emotional, and spiritual aspects of yoga have been a very integral and important part of my life over 15 years

now and they have also played a very important role in how I recovered from mental health issues and how I now actively work on making sure I don't have relapses and if I do have relapses, that I can deal with them. So, academic mental health I suppose, for me, the mental health aspect has always been part of my life, and it's only recently, because I've become an academic, it sort of merged into academic mental health. I grew up in Switzerland and I also grew up with what psychiatrists would call adverse childhood experiences. So, when I was a teenager I suffered from eating disorders. That was prevalent for most of my teenage years, my 20s, and even some of my 30s. And there was underlying complex PTSD and depression, so it's been a very very long journey from and from sort of being surviving to now probably more thriving, and also sharing my experience, and at this stage mental health obviously as we all know and seen in this conference is something that many academics and students and PhD students struggle with and I'm no different, because I have a long history of mental health issues. The busy life and pressure of academia can be hard to balance and I really like this image which on the right, which is victim-survivor-thriver-inspirer and for me this really sums up a lot of my journey, which I'm starting as a victim spending most of my teenage years and 20s in survivor mode and you know to some extent, starting to thrive and then in my 30s and now in my 40s really spending more and more time and shifting more and more into thriving mode, but also now being an advocate and trying to inspire others. That doesn't mean that I don't still have days where I'm in "surviving" mode and just recently I had a few days where I was really really struggling and I was deep in a hole and it was really all about surviving and putting one foot in front of the other. But I suppose, I've been lucky that over the last two-three decades, I've been slowly moving more towards the thriving and I'm hoping to, in the academic world, be someone that inspires an environment that is more respectful of people with mental health issues, which is why I often started writing about, so I've wrote some small amounts of articles, some of them on LinkedIn and some of them are on edge for scholars. And they are often just about tips about how my world is or life as a PI looks like, but some of it has also been about my struggle with mental health and how it is hard to stay mentally well when you have a very demanding job. So now, let's get to the topic of this actual discussion, which is the pandemic. So, I'm going to talk about both my personal challenges, but also then as a PI and as we were talking before the session started. Australia has been both in a very fortunate position, but also on the flip side struggling with the impact of border closures. Some of you might know that Australia, at the start of the pandemic, closed its international borders and that has been the case for 18 months now. So, I have family overseas. I'm originally from Switzerland. I have not seen my family for over two years now. It also made it very hard, because I actually have a job. Well, I used to have my job in Sydney here on the map of Australia and now I'm in Brisbane, but my husband actually lives in Perth and that is more than five, that isn't about a five-hour flight from Brisbane. Before COVID, we used to see each other every four five weeks and that unfortunately has not been possible, because not just the international borders are closed in Australia, but the internal borders between states have been closed. So last year, I wasn't able to see my husband for more than six months and now it's been three months again because the border, as you see here in the line to western Australia, is actually closed. So, for me, that is one of the questions that came up in the speaker notes. What challenges did people have during the pandemic? And for me it wasn't new challenges, it was just that they were exacerbated. I was away from my support network. I couldn't go home to Perth. I did all of that while trying to build up a lab. It was

also, I moved four times in the last nine years because of my job. This has been quite stressful, and trying to transition from being a researcher to being a PI, while a pandemic's happening, is not exactly without challenges. It's also been very hard to see people losing their jobs. Australia has... The higher education sector in Australia has been (affected) very bad by the pandemic. International border closures means no international students, and our government has failed to provide financial help for universities, so a lot of people thousands of academics have lost their jobs and it's been very hard to see that while at the same time, I'm privileged and grateful to be in a supportive of mine personally, but as the biggest the system has been struggling. And then from a viewpoint as a PI and then I think Neda can give the viewpoint of a student, and I'm someone that just recently started to become a PI and my lab has been locked down twice, so this is now the second time in 2020 was about two months and now it's been locked down for three months. Obviously, that means it had a severe impact on my research. That doesn't stop the pressure of "publish or perish" so the system moves on relentlessly, yet my lab has been shut down. So, trying to maintain a productivity on one hand, while being supportive to my postdoc and my students has been a real struggle and I think some of the other speakers in previous sessions talked about how the system is literally relentless. So, the system itself doesn't care about you. I'm just a number. I'm just someone that produces research and while I personally have a lot of supportive people around me, the system itself doesn't particularly care. So, I've also been trying to buffer a lot of the machinery and red tape in academia for my students. We are very fortunate in Australia that a lot of things are very regulated. People usually are on scholarships. They have an income. People have a right to four weeks of holiday a year. Most scholarships come with maternity leave. They come with sick leave. So we are very fortunate to have that framework, but the pandemic meant that a lot of students need to apply for extensions and they're often not granted. So, I've been trying to help my students to navigate that system and it's just been helped, it's just been frustrating to see how the system itself doesn't care. So, you're trying to be that human buffer. I'm trying to be that human buffer for my students between what can be a ruthless system and hopefully produce a research environment that supports them and you know run rather than just running group meetings, we've been running catch-up sessions, where we just have a cup of tea together or drink on Friday night or where we do activities, where we talk a bit more about how are you? rather than just about the research, because it's been hard. My students can't see their families overseas. Some of my students that never experienced mental health issues, all of a sudden start feeling really agitated and anxious. So, it's been the last 12 months, for me, has been rather than focusing on my research productivity, a lot of time I spent trying to support my postdoc and my students. So, and I think it's a perfect sort of transition for our second speaker, because Neda can give you that perception or that had that view from a student rather than a PI.

[Neda]

Yeah thank you. It was actually interesting for me to hear from a PI point point of view. Challenges are for everyone that for sure.

Can you see my screen? Hello?

[Audience]

Yeah we can

[Neda]

Oh, okay, I thought that I just lost it. So, I want to thank you, the organizers. I attended a few of the ones that I could, actually from MINDS conference today and I really enjoyed it. Thank you for inviting me for this session. So, I am Neda Rashidi-Ranjbar. I'm currently in Toronto. I'm studying my last year of PhD at University of Toronto and I want to start with a just over brief overview of my journey. So, I got my medical doctorate from Tehran University of Medical Science from my home country Iran. Then, I moved to Europe for a master's degree in Cognitive Neuroscience and for my PhD studies in medical science I moved to Toronto. So, I've experienced quite a lot of international student life and I can say from experience that the majority of challenges, but not all of them, are not unique to the host country. So, today I would like to talk briefly about challenges that are unique to international students both before and then during the pandemic, and then I will talk about our community initiative and how that has helped us to create a support system during the pandemic.

So, what were the challenges or what are the challenges before the pandemic or in general for international students? So, we all know that graduate student graduate school is hard. It's stressful, but in addition to the hardship in a graduate student's life, that are many there are certainly more challenges that an international student will face including, but not limited, to visa and immigration service, adapting to a new culture and a new academic environment, and there is often a language barrier that can make this adaptation even more difficult. We have financial challenges and often struggle with finding affordable housing, especially in expensive cities like Toronto. We need to find a new social network and connect with new people and we may often feel homesick, and in my case, that would be almost every day. So together these challenges may ultimately lead to social isolation and that can lead to mental health problems, including stress and anxiety, and as a result, a hampered potential in our personal and academic lives. So what were the challenges during the pandemic for international students? So this pandemic, we know, has certainly mounted the existing pressure for everyone, but for international students, I will talk about international students, we were facing more isolation and less access to healthcare mental health public resources that could be due to perceived stigma associated with mental health services and/or financial informational language and cultural barriers without considering that many international students do not have a resident outside those campuses nor they had accessibility to a safe return to their home countries. But due to closed borders, a reduced amount of international flies or potential exposure to COVID-19 during the travel. So as a result we had an increased rate of mental health problems among international students, and

as you can see, there are a handful of recent studies about the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of international students. These studies have concluded that international students are one of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations that needs more attention from the government universities and supervisors. The question for us was that what can we do as international students? So in the international graduate students in the institute for medical science, we created a community to address some of these challenges and mainly mental health. In October 2020, we formed the IMS international community and almost a year after, we are happy to see that our community has grown and we have new student leaders involved in our community. And since we're committed to building a welcoming community, we meet every week and so far we have had more than 40 meetings. And now our activities what we have done so far in ims international community? So we had a set of informal meetings, where we invited all the international students at IMS to join us. Our aim was to create a sense of belonging and community and a safe space to share our experiences, our challenges as international students, and find solutions together.

We have also created a monthly seminar series to create a space for science communication networking and again creating a sense of community that can ultimately help us with our well-beings. We received funding for our monthly seminar series initiative from university, and so far, we have had eight seminar series, and today actually was the eighth and it was it was really amazing. Our speakers are all successful international scholars from all around the world. And in a very friendly and laid-back setting, our guest speakers have shared their stories, experiences, and their path to success with us at the IMS international community and we're also happy to see that these seminar series are also well received by both international and domestic students and we hope that our community could be the bridge between the international and domestic student groups.

And recently we have started another initiative and secured funding for that the IMS international community engagement book club. Many students both international and domestic have shown interest so far and we look forward to hold our first session in November. So if you are interested to learn more about our activities, follow us on social media and spread the word. And also, I want to say if you are inspired to start your own community and you think we might be able to help or if you have already established your own community and have a lot of experience to share with us, please reach out to us and we'll be very happy to hear from you.

It's together that we grow, thank you.

All right, thank you to our speakers for giving presentations. I'll now go into the questions now since you both have already kind of covered questions along the theme of struggles and challenges during the pandemic, I do actually want to touch on kind of extend that in what you

based on what you have talked about and based on what you have learned, what do you think the situation is like for students with disabilities or already pre-existing conditions as they are going through the pandemic? How do you especially know that disabled international students- how do you have do you guys have any information on how those students are doing and what if they have any unique structure unique struggles that have popped up during the pandemic?

[Neda]

Yeah unfortunately, I do not have information on the students, but I can imagine that any person with any existing problem including physical disabilities any other disabilities, they had harder time during the pandemic that would be my guess.

[Evelyne]

yeah i'm like nia i'm leader i don't personally have a student um that lives with a uh lives with a disability but i do know from from what i've um just from what i've heard through the community in australia that many of the academics and students that identify with a disability felt like existing struggles were essentially amplified and to some degree, this lack of structure was exaggerated. So and i think particularly in australia we we've struggled a lot and we're still struggling with the vaccine roll out and people that live with a disability, so a very good friend of mine is for her mother with a disability it's been very hard because if no one's vaccinated, you you it's hard to find someone that cares for you. so but in terms of students, i i don't have any personal experience but i can just imagine that it would be even harder to to struggle through a pandemic with a disability, but if anyone of the listeners is from Australia or would like to need to maybe help some find some information in the Australian system i'm more than i'm happy to to um help

[Sarai]

Alrighty so i think we actually I think you two actually did quite a good job talking about struggles and challenges during the pandemic, so I would like actually to start talking about the support systems but specifically since we do have this grad student versus PI versus versus point of views currently on the discussion, I would actually like to ask you what do you think are the responsibilities of professors and higher-ups versus students when it comes to helping each other on our day-to-day, so neither you set up that student group in order to connect with other students and i think that's probably like yeah that's something i'm guessing you're thinking that's probably something that students can do but i would also like to know what you guys also think you guys you y'all would think about what a professor or a graduate student should also be responsible for if, that is actually a responsibility of a graduate student to set up those kind of groups?

[Neda]

i think actually supervisors are highly responsible. They they have people that are working under them right. So the the culture that they have established before or during the pandemic that has a direct impact on everybody that is working in the lab and it might be you know based on personal preferences but some for some PIs they might not want to you know get involved in the personal aspect of the student's life or what's happening and they might be only interested in the academic, which is really not fair because we are not just that and we have a life and it's been like a challenging time. So I think that supervisors are you know they're the higher in the in the sort of a system, they're more responsible.

[Evelyne]

Yeah yeah, look I I agree with Neda, but I think unfortunately my experience in the Australian system is that it really boils down to the personal approach of the PI or we call them "group leader" in Australia. And I have always been someone that is very inclusive, not just in terms of inclusive that everyone's welcome in my group, but also I've always been someone that shared my own struggle with mental health issues. I share my own my own personal life stories in my lab so and then I think that's because like many academics, I live and breathe academia. I live and breathe science. So for me a lot of my mental health struggles, I can't separate them too much from my personal life and my academic life because, like I wrote my on my slide, you are not your PhD. That has been one of the biggest struggles for me is to not you know find a sense of of "I am good enough" find a sense of "hey, it's actually okay to take the weekend off". You don't always have to be the best at everything. This has been so much part of my personal life and and part of me as an academic and I've always shared that openly with my students and postdoc and I welcome my staff and students to share it with me and if they feel like they need to take a day off because they're struggling, they are welcome to and and because only when you are well, you are productive. But I've also seen PI's that have a very very different approach. I've I've have students, who through friends and colleagues, heard you know "maybe you should talk to Evelyn. I think she might listen to you." I've had students who come to me who are not from my group who I didn't even know before because they are with PIs that are really not supportive, where they say "look at I pay you" [in Australia you get a stipend] "I pay you to do research. I pay you to do 10 hours a day whatever many hours a day and I don't care whether your cat has died." That kind of approach and that's sad I I try to foster environment where that's not the case. I think it's my responsibility to look after my students and my staff and I think it's the university's responsibilities' and unfortunately again it comes down to personal, to the person because my my head of school at the moment for example is incredibly supportive of people, of their personal lives, and their academic lives, but what if he leaves? He might be replaced by someone that is not and then the university doesn't really have a lot of framework to enforce it. So it's down to the individual PI, group leader, or head of school, or faculty dean to to have a supportive environment. In Australia, we're lucky that we have a framework where students are paid through a scholarship usually and people have four weeks of annual leave. They have sick leave. But that is a framework, but beyond that, the support really depends on the individual PI and and that that means you have to wisely choose. And I like to say to people that talk to me about when they want to do a PhD, I say "don't choose your project, choose your choose your supervisor". I'm not saying that you know I'm a chemist. I would never do I would have never done a project in synthetic chemistry because it's one of the few things I failed in

undergrad. It's just I'm not good at making things in the lab, so I became a computational chemist. So by all means choose a project that you're excited about that that is based on your strength academic strength, but within that, choose your supervisor because you're going to spend four years in Australia, four to four and a half years with that person in that group and you better make sure that's a supportive environment, particularly if you are someone that is prone to mental health issues. So choose your supervisor wisely.

[Neda]

I really like that. You know during my master's, I was just asking all the PhD students what would they advise if they go back and everybody, like every single of them, would say choose your peer supervisor and that like wisely and your PhD title or project is not that important that is your supervisor. So you can grow with the supervisor, so that was one thing that I actually really cared about my PhD and I'm happy that I did. You know, you but you also said something, in addition to supervisor they also like a lab environment or lab culture. There are also other colleagues in the lab, so it's not only supervisor and depending on you know how hands-on they are or like they're not, you know depends like how much of presence they have in the lab, there are different factors. But I think yeah overall yeah supervisor is like very very important.

[Evelyne]

and I wish university would take it- universities as a whole the system would take it more serious but that is the role of the supervisor because I've seen supervisors or PIs and group leaders that are very unsupportive and create toxic environments and there is rarely any repercussions for them as long as they bring in enough money and as long as they publish enough, quite often there's a lot of tolerance for negative behavior, provided particularly if that particular group leader or PI is is very successful and success successful I mean in the in the metrics of academia you know publish and bringing in money. And it is often then the PIs like me who really care for students and postdocs that end up supporting people that aren't even part of my lab. But I wish universities and I think we are moving towards a system at least in Australia, where universities are taking this serious but we still have a long way to go in making sure that there is not just reward for positive behavior, but also repercussion for PIs that that create toxic environments.

[Sarai]

All righty it looks like we have a question from the audience related to this, as well as a comment.

[Sasha]

Okay, thank you, thank you very much for great points and presentations both to Dr. Deplazes and Nida. Thank you so much. I'm just wanted to comment on being an international student and having a disability. I personally have a lot of struggles with mental health and I'm an

international student and I also relate a lot with those points about traveling a lot and having to move many times, as well as same goes for Dr. Deplazes, and I think this is something that I'm personally curious is I think academia heavily relies on people moving around and people being international and going to a new place to start or move advance their careers. And if there is any ideas that you might have of how this could be embedded- the support for students and researchers as maybe some moving packages or something that would allow you to transition smoothly to a new area, as well as maybe providing more information because I feel like before you actually move to the place you cannot really find a lot of information like the advice that you were giving about like researching PIs things like that. How could we promote that like access to that information before you actually transition to a new place?

[Neda]

And that's actually a very good point. You know like to think of packages to to make all these transitions at least not as hard as it is right now. But yeah, I don't know like for students what what can we do but regarding like moving to other countries and like the fact that we cannot know so you know that we cannot get in-person to see the supervisor, the environment, or other factors that we're interested in. So what I have found myself it's better than nothing. It's just you might still you will not get still like the whole picture, but it has helped me a lot just talking with different people that who are already there and asking like different questions. What is important to me how they would answer like what is the you know for instance in the lab what is the attitude? How they how they talk about you know like there is always a sense like you talk what is the culture of the lab, for instance? How how life life and stuff like, what is the balance? Is is the prof like is it it's does he care that or she? This stuff you can find out but yeah there are like still like some details yeah we will only find out when you arrive. And in addition to that, I would add because like I had this experience like because I'm an international, I might not have the exact same experience as a domestic student living in one environment or one lab you know. Like so our perception is quite different due to cultural, language, various different stuff. So I would actually find people who are closer to me, so then I would think that their opinion might be you know better reflecting of what I'm looking for if that makes sense.

[Evelyne]

So in terms of I think again, it comes down to there's a difference between what the university can provide and and what the individual group leader or PI provides. And I know in Australia, when you come as an international student, there is the international student association and the graduate school who try to connect you with a lot of things like housing services, how to deal with you know medicare, how to deal with other government institutions, maybe maybe immigration services. And then there is the university who tries to help you start your PhD so to graduate at school. But I think it would be good if there would also be I think packages in terms of financial support would very much be useful because I know it's very it's costly to move. I've moved five four four or five times in the last nine years only within Australia, but I've been most of the time that was on the on the salary of a postdoc, which in Australia is quite reasonable. But

I'm aware that a lot of international students, when they come to Australia, obviously financially they're very much struggling. So having packages available could be something that could be for example in in Australia it could be something that's integrated into the scholarship that would be something that certainly would help, I would assume. But I think it like like Neda said, I think the most important thing is try to find out as much as you can before you come or ideally even before you commit to to a postdoc. So let's, for example, say you're a PhD student. You're about to transition to postdoc. I know it's very hard to find a postdoc anyway and if you don't want to do a postdoc, by all means, to find a job outside of the academic system, which is which is something I very much support. Try to find out as much as you can about the system there before you get there and that could probably be through contacting postdoc association early career associations. In Australia, most universities have an early career committee. It's usually faculty-based, sometimes it's university-based. Try to get into contact with as many people as possible. Use your personal network to maybe talk to people that are living that city, for example. I try to to get as much information as you can. I'm not sure whether answers the question.

[Saraï]

All right, so let's actually try being a little let's be a little bit positive and let us try to get some answers to the question on how do we ensure that the challenges affecting academics mental health during the pandemic do not continue to affect their day-to-day lives after the pandemic? But I also want to extend this to how do we prevent us academia from falling back on old habits, so how if that makes sense? Evelyne, you want to start this time?

[Evelyne]

Oh yes. I couldn't- I can start. I think one of the things I really try is to now slowly move my the advocacy and the environment I try to create in my own research group a bit outside and and that is that is not easy because you you working against the big machinery. But I think we need to make sure that the experience that everyone had during the pandemic is not forgotten that quickly because I know that a lot of people say to me "Oh, I've never experienced mental health issues, but now during the pandemic for the first time, I had a small inkling of what it feels like to be depressed, what it feels like to be anxious because you can't leave the house." And I think many people that before the pandemic didn't have any lived experience of mental health issues, either by themselves or through people close to them, have now had for the first time and experience with struggling with mental health. And I think we should try to make sure that we remem remind people and how much that is a struggle and how that affects your life and your productivity. That we can use that to foster a more inclusive environment, but also to literally remind people and say "okay this remember how you felt how bad that was well for some people that is their life, and can we make things can we put into place structures that prevent that." And for me and that is my experience where I'm at at the moment as a PI is it is about that

toxic work culture that needs to be broken and that is a larger structure that is not easy to deal with, but I think we as PIs, but also as student organizations like Neda, I really like how students get together and then use that to talk to the graduate research school and say “we need to put things into place. Come up with practical ideas about how we can support PhD students beyond the pandemic”, you know? Have maybe have free, advocate for free counseling sessions for the unit for the PhD students. Have a group that might be led by a psychologist, where people meet once a month to talk about their their struggles. Make sure that on the PhD graduate research school website, there is a website about these are resources in in our country that are available for people with mental, so that it is also about removing the stigma to be open about it. That is okay to say you're struggling with mental health. That is another big part that I think that people like me and PIs, but also groups like Neda's student group, can make a push towards the universities and say make it more open, make information available, and put money behind it, and say “yes, we are serious about supporting them.” Put money behind it to put up support structures and maybe remind people that hey remember how you were struggling during the pandemic? Well, for some of us that is everyday life”.

[Saraï]

Thank you. Neda, can I- would you- what would you like to add to that?

[Neda]

I was just thinking you know, you know pandemic sort of surprised everyone like all the countries like we everybody was talking about that. We do not have the infrastructure or we didn't we didn't prepare the infrastructure for such a you know event that happened. And I think from that we can now learn that you know we know that mental health problems has risen during the pandemic, and I don't think that it will go away so fast. The pandemic is not not going away so fast. So like I think like gradually maybe we are going back to normal and it might not be the previous normal, but I guess like in the meantime what what is necessary is like to think about the infrastructures of having you know counseling sessions, what is necessary, what sort of support we can deliver? So so those are important you know- the policy basically the policy making of those infrastructures. And for instance, like University of Toronto, I know that there is a mental health service that they would give you six months of free counseling and I had used that myself and it was really helpful for the first year that I was here. But six months is not enough. You know like for as an international student, I was struggling the first two years and so I I I could find my own therapist, and then you know I I really wanted to. It was important for me you know like to take care of my mental health, so but but that is something that it's not so hard and they can they can just provide it, like why should it be like six months? It's great that there is a six months availability, but again it's going to you know continue and there are a lot of issues and I think like now more and more we're hearing about people coming out of saying that “I am, you know, struggling with this disorder or this problem”. And I'm hoping that in the future or near

future, the stigma slightly or you know at least, it is not as bad as it is right now and I think like people of power if they come out and you know like you're a PI and I actually really like that you talk about your your personal aspect sort of. Like what you're struggling with. That could be that could open the door between you know you and your students that they can also discuss this and this is something okay to talk about it and it sort of takes out the stigma. So I think like people who are in power, they have a bigger role and if people just, you know, have the courage to come out and talk about it, it will it will come it will become hopefully a normal thing over a few years or i don't know how it how long would that take. Sometimes it is really cultural, like it's like so deep culture and I had this discussion. So in our actually in our student group, I have realized that okay so I'm talking about therapy and counseling and to me this is very okay and like everybody should do it, but there are other people who really don't think like you know they don't want to talk about it as it's just when you say mental, they just think oh mental is they just don't even want to talk about mental health or like when they say mental health, they're associating it with like some sort of weakness, which is not true. Like a lot of like all of us struggle with a lot of problems. It's like it's today I was listening is like a spectrum of mental illness basically, so I mean we can we can switch between stages like in different situations during our life. So I think, yeah again it goes back down to we can we can for sure advocate, but there is so much that we can do. Again like I think it's it's much for policy making and maybe actually as grad students. Like I could yeah, I mean me or other, we can think about going to policy, there is a stream after. I mean you know there's like jobs for policy making related to this. This is something that we can think of if we are interested in that. Yeah but I think we need a lot of resources.

[Sarai]

All righty. So now we're going to be turning off the recording to go into the question and answer period.

[Sarai]

Alrighty, so once again thank you to our speakers for coming and to our audience members for participating, listening, and asking their questions. And with that, it is my honor to say that MINDS, this what at the end this is it. We're done MINDS 2021 everybody! And I now yeah, I now give the floor to Alaa in order to do the concluding marks. If I can.

[Neda]

I also want to say a huge congratulations to the organizers. You did an amazing job!

[Alaa]

Oh thank you, thank you, Neda. I'm feeling extra emotional right now, it could be the fatigue. The actual the discussions were so great. This was this surpassed our expectations by a million percent and we're not just saying that because we organized this. This was very lovely. So on a more scripted, I guess, closing remarks. So this concludes the MINDS conference 2021, which is amazing thank you all so much for being here. On behalf of the organizing committee and Dragonfly Mental Health, I would like to thank you all and the speakers today for such great discussions. These conversations held today would not have been as fruitful if it weren't for your interests and great passion for this very important topic. This conference was a tremendous venture and none of it would have been possible without the work of the many volunteers behind the scenes. We hope that you all thoroughly enjoyed the sessions and that based on the conversations held today, we can begin to respond together to the systemic issues regarding mental health and academia. The sessions were held over four time zones and they have been partially recorded and, subject to the approval of our speakers, will be made available to our web on our website. We will notify you by email when these become available. In the meantime, feel free to check out our website, where you can find mental health resources that were collected from our attendees, as well as our team from all over the world. As we end off the conference, we kindly ask you to provide us feedback versus the via the short form survey, oh it's contagious, so that we can improve make improvements for this conference moving forward. So i'm going to paste it here in the chat and we're also going to send it to you by email shortly after. And with that, thank you all so much for your time and we hope you have a lovely day! Woo!

[Neda]

Thank you for having me. Bye!

[Sarai]

History is made, literally! It is! First international mental health conference is officially made. Yeah all right, bye everyone. Let's all agree to get food and go to sleep!

[Sasha]

Self-care. Yeah, that's the time. Bye bye