

Successful virtual UK Kidney Week sees record-breaking registration

The British Renal Society and Renal Association work together to deliver the annual UK Kidney Week conference. Caitlin Sewell, Neil Sheerin, Paul Cockwell and Ellen Castle report on the success of the first digital UKKW conference

■ virtual conference ■ COVID-19 ■ kidney community ■ inclusivity

UK Kidney Week (UKKW) is an annual, multi-professional event, and is a much-awaited conference in the UK kidney community calendar. It is jointly hosted by the British Renal Society (BRS) and the Renal Association (RA), and is supported by an event organising company, Executive Business Support (EBS). The UKKW programme committee is led by a multi-professional team of clinicians and academics from across the UK kidney community. This ensures that the programme content is relevant to the kidney community and their needs.

The UKKW event comprises up-to-date research, state-of-the-art

lectures, educational sessions, industry partnership programmes and networking with clinicians, academics, scientists, kidney charities and trainees. It is a fantastic example of a collaboration that meets the educational needs of the UK kidney community. Last year's conference (UKKW 2019) saw a record number of registrants (1262) at the face-to-face event in Brighton. UKKW 2019 was awarded the Nephrology 360 Degrees Conference Award (Desai, 2019).

An increase in attendance

UKKW 2020 was due to be held in Birmingham in June; however, with the outbreak of COVID-19, the programme committee made the decision to modify and transfer the programme to a digital platform. The conference was postponed to October to allow delegates who were serving on the NHS frontline to attend. To facilitate optimal attendance, the 276 delegates who had pre-registered for the conference completed a survey collecting their thoughts on the feasibility of attending a virtual event, the timings and format of a virtual event and the registration fee. This survey allowed the UKKW programme committee to tailor not only the educational content, but the timings and delivery of UKKW 2020.

Functionality and usability are key factors to facilitate engagement with online products (Goodwin, 1987). Therefore, the UKKW 2020 programme committee selected OnAIR (EventsAIR,

2020) as the online portal to deliver the UKKW 2020 conference, with technical support provided by EBS. This platform allowed delegates to view sessions both live and on demand. OnAIR also facilitated live discussion panels, virtual poster rooms, virtual patient art and photography displays, industry symposiums, industry exhibition space and virtual networking.

UKKW 2020 delivered a series of educational sessions using a virtual platform held over a 2-week period, from 5 October—15 October 2020. The kidney community has been at the forefront of the pandemic, and UKKW provided a much-needed space to share unique experiences and new learnings during this time. Transitioning to a virtual conference saw a record-breaking 2659 attendees. There were 94 speakers and 22 different chairs throughout the virtual conference.

Virtual success

UKKW is often regarded as an opportunity to meet and network with colleagues who share the enthusiasm for best practice in kidney care and science. With a switch to online, UKKW integrated a virtual exhibition with opportunities to meet industry representatives and discuss the latest device and treatment options.

The topics covered during UKKW 2020 included COVID-19-associated acute kidney injury (AKI); an update on dialysis, including changes with

Caitlin Sewell

Communications Officer, Renal Association
Email: caitlin.sewell@renal.org

Neil Sheerin

Professor of Nephrology, Consultant
Nephrologist, Newcastle University

Paul Cockwell

Professor of Nephrology, Consultant
Nephrologist, Queen Elizabeth
Hospital, Birmingham

Ellen Castle

Communications Officer, British Renal
Society, Specialist Renal Physiotherapist, King's
College Hospital London



Source: UK Kidney Week

UK Kidney Week saw a record 2659 registrants this year

the COVID-19 pandemic; best clinical and scientific abstracts; clinical trials; improving diabetes in haemodialysis; refining chronic kidney disease care; single-cell omics; trainee case studies; the launch of the BRS 2020 multi-professional renal workforce plan; an update on the UK Renal Registry; Glomerular disease and vasculitis; and the challenges to patients and healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were also seven industry symposia sessions. Overall, there was a sense of resilience, shared learning and reflection.

The highest scoring clinical abstract award-winners for UKKW 2020 were Dr Rukshana Shroff, Dr Rona Smith, Dr Sharlene Greenwood, Dr Alexander Hamilton, Hannah Lyons and Dr Benjamin Anderson. The highest scoring scientific abstract winners were Timo Hascheler, Dr Monica Gamez, Xinlu Pan, Dr Alexa Wonnacott, Dr Michael Crompton, Dr Laura Smyth and Dr Janev Fehmi.

UKKW 2020 also retained its poster hall; switching to an online gallery allowed over 570 abstracts to be viewed, 532 posters were downloaded and presentations were accessed on demand. This format of the display also allowed attendees to submit questions directly to authors via an online Q&A box and opened up channels for conversation.

The lack of social elements that are often associated with conferences

were partly mitigated by the rise of discussions on social media, continuing these conversations and interactions in an informal way that still allowed for networking.

The UKKW fun run returned this year in a virtual format, with proceeds going to three kidney charities (Kidney Care UK, Kidney Research UK and the National Kidney Federation). There were five individual entries, six teams and a total of 33 runners took part in the fun run. The first team to complete the 26.2 mile distance were the renal dietitians from Leicester General Renal Unit. The first individual to complete the run was Maria Tennant from Kidney Research UK. Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, Glasgow, had the most entries from a single team. Congratulations to all participating runners.

Accessibility and inclusivity

Perhaps one of the most profound changes to this year's event was the large number of international registrants. With the shift to a virtual conference, UKKW was made accessible to a larger and more diverse audience and saw registrations from 23 countries, including Bangladesh, Peru, Brazil, Nigeria and Qatar.

Travelling to conferences and events and being away from home has often been problematic for people with children or disabilities, and is also associated with a significant carbon

footprint. Financial and visa restrictions have also prevented those from certain countries from presenting or attending.

With an online Kidney Week, barriers associated with travelling were removed, and the overall event became more inclusive and drew a larger, more diverse audience to add to conversations and offer insight.

In addition to the diverse attendance, all of the 85 renal units throughout the UK registered, giving everyone within their unit access to the event. The UKKW programme committee attributed the high attendance to the new fee structure and engagement of key stakeholders in developing a relevant and engaging programme. For the first time, renal units around the UK were able to purchase a unit registration fee, allowing every member of the multi-professional team to engage with the live or on-demand content.

Next steps

The UKKW programme committee have already started gathering data and feedback, and are making plans to enhance UKKW 2021 and improve interactivity. Given the nature of COVID-19, it is likely that UKKW 2021 will have a virtual component.

A virtual UKKW will never replace an in-person Kidney Week, but the two are not mutually exclusive, and future conferences should capture the strengths of both.

The UKKW 2020 programme committee would like to thank all our speakers, chairs, programme organisers, industry partners, EBS and delegates for helping us deliver a successful virtual UKKW 2020. All sessions are now available to watch on demand, on the online conference portal. For more information, visit ukkw.org.uk. **JKC**

References

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