

Covid-19 Reflection, Kevin Muirhead



I am in my second year of a full-time PhD that explores the role of technology in supporting the dementia education needs of health and social care practitioners in rural Scotland. My project is funded by ESIF until December 2021. COVID-19 first impacted on my research in February this year when an international conference that I was due to attend was cancelled due to concerns about the new virus. In March, my research was suspended as it involves significant input from health care professionals and face-to-face contact with people with dementia and their families. The timing was unfortunate as I had just received a positive ethical opinion and was poised to start data collection. I implemented a short-term plan for making constructive use of my time during the suspension period and have redirected my focus onto thesis chapters and a publication. I am mindful though, that to avoid delays with PhD completion, this approach cannot be sustained beyond a few months. It is increasingly probable that I will need to consider protocol amendments for alternative data collection strategies that are less likely to be subject to restrictions. Dealing with uncertainty and an increased sense of isolation have been particular challenges during the current outbreak. Isolation can be problematic for PhD students at the best of times and it has taken a lot of resilience to keep up the pace, motivation, and commitment necessary for PhD research. As I write this, the future remains very uncertain and it is likely to bring many unforeseen challenges that will require high degrees of flexibility and adaptability. It is more certain that this pandemic will continue to accelerate the use of interactive digital solutions which have already enabled profound changes to the way that we work. Virtual teaching and learning are likely to increase, and evolve, as a result of COVID-19 which will add to the usefulness of my research. Technology-enabled dementia education is now more relevant than ever it was 'before'.

Kevin Muirhead

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