

Report
Rogers Chair Activities, 2015-16
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July 27, 2015

A year of building up contacts in the dementia care community in London, as well as in dementia research at Western and elsewhere, led to three exciting results for the Rogers Chair this year.

1. Public Lectures

I launched a series of talks in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, looking at dementia from a range of disciplinary perspectives. In November 2014, we welcomed Dr. Lynne Howarth, Professor in the Information School at University of Toronto, reporting on her funded research applying information classification principles to the cognitive effects of dementia. Later that month, Dr. Norma Coates, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western, spoke on the relationship of music and dementia, and its potential for opening new possibilities both in cultural studies and in dementia care.

In February 2015, Dr. J.B. Orange, Professor and Director of the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Western, reported on his research in the analysis of communication patterns among individuals living with dementia. And in March 2015, Dr. Sharon Sliwinski, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western, addressed the relationship of dementia to her research in the culture and politics of photography, dream, and illness.

In addition, I spoke on information and dementia outside the University, at a public lecture at the London Public Library entitled “The Music Cure: Reflections on Music and Dementia” in January 2015.

2. Symposium:

On Saturday, April 11, 2015, we held a public symposium at the Masonville Public Library, entitled “Redefining Dementia: New Facts; Deeper Images; Fresh Stories. A One-Day Symposium for Future Professionals with an Interest in Dementia Care.” This symposium was a free public event aimed at individuals living with dementia and their supporters, as well as care professionals. We had a capacity crowd of 80 people, and the event was covered by CBC Radio. The day featured:

A keynote address, “Reducing the Stigma of Dementia,” by Karen Johnson, Director of Alzheimer’s Outreach Services of McCormick Home in London;

A panel called “Hearing from the Experts,” featuring 4 individuals living with dementia, together with their caregivers, talking frankly, honestly and intelligently about the challenges they face;

A presentation by former CBC host Robert Harris entitled “Music and Dementia,” in which he explored the cognitive aspects of music and its power to revive memory;

A final brainstorming session in which we all came together to explore ideas for telling better stories about dementia in our popular media and our journalism practices, as well as providing better information services for those who are living with dementia on a daily basis.

3. Documentary

Meredith Levine, a Journalism faculty member here at FIMS, has filmed an intimate personal documentary of a woman living with early-onset Alzheimer’s Disease. The documentary follows this courageous individual, together with her husband, as they use the services provided at Alzheimer Outreach Services, and as they adapt to her constantly-changing condition.

While I was the nominal holder of the Rogers Chair, the events I describe came from three of us: myself, Meredith Levine, and Nicole Dalmer, a doctoral student at FIMS specializing in health information services. The three of us planned these events together, and I’m deeply grateful to Meredith and Nicole for embracing the possibilities of the Rogers Chair so enthusiastically, and with such patience and dedication.

In addition, I must thank Nancy O’Regan and the Alzheimer Society of London/Middlesex, together with Karen Johnson and Alzheimer Outreach Services, for helping us to break through academic barriers and find a way of directly communicating with the London dementia care community. I must also thank the staff and administration at FIMS for their support: particularly Tom Carmichael, Dean, Jacquelyn Burkell, Assistant Dean of Research, and Nick Dyer-Witthford, Associate Dean.

Finally, I would like to thank Rogers for funding the Rogers Chair. Through this funding, we managed to reach across barriers, and find new ways of telling stories that make a difference to the many individuals whose lives have been altered by dementia-related conditions.