

Flying remote

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The 62nd *Drosophila* Research Conference, organized by GSA, will take place at the end of March, as a virtual event [see <https://genetics-gsa.org/drosophila-2021/>]. The remote format, though dictated by circumstance, offers new opportunities, especially for global participation. The conference will comprise plenary and parallel platform presentations, plus workshops and other sessions on a huge range of scientific topics, as well as equity and inclusion, techniques and technologies, and education. There will also be important ‘extras’, such as Flybase and vendor demos, customized for the remote audience.

One of the workshops will cover issues in publishing. Fronted by me and my editorial colleague Kelly Ross, who acts as Commissioning Editor for *Fly* as well as Executive Editor of *Epigenetics*, it will be structured as a panel discussion, directly addressing written questions from the community, then inviting moderated comments from ‘thefloor’, or whatever the zoomosphere should be called.

I had intended to write at length about the event and its possibilities, but can’t even find the words to compose a cheery, gung-ho ad for an exciting event without first directly addressing its context, at the height of the global pandemic. I’m sure I speak for the entire *Fly* research community by expressing my condolences and support for all those who have lost family, colleagues, mentors and friends. When it hits you personally, and this now impacts most of us, you realize that Covid-19 is not just an academic or even a political issue, but a human one. But for each person who has died, there are five or ten struggling with long-Covid (also known as ‘long-haulers’), some not even realizing that their odd and persistent symptoms might be connected with the pandemic at all. And they seem invisible in the daily statistics, where we are all informed how many have tested positive, how many are in intensive care, how many have died and how many have been vaccinated.

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The plight of those millions of long-Covid sufferers and their families will not be alleviated by the vaccination programme, by any break-throughs in antiviral therapy or by any future public health measures. We need to adjust our expectations and restructure our workplaces and institutions of learning so as to treat them with respect and understanding. Treating them in the same way as those who fought in the world wars and returned home with permanent scars and disabilities, we need to bow our heads in collective shame at our woeful failure to contain the disease that exposed them to the fates they now suffer. We must ensure that their needs and limitations are taken fully into account in all matters. And we owe it to them and to future generations to plan more effectively for the next such event, even if it is a century in the future.

Returning to my original theme, it is obviously too soon to say how far virtual congresses will replace or modify face-to-face meetings in the future. The upcoming, remote *Drosophila* meeting is an experiment that is being conducted out of necessity, and will undoubtedly be rough around the edges in many aspects. But we all have a part to play in making it as rewarding as possible. Our workshop, for example, is scheduled for what will be late evening in Europe, the night before a public holiday. But someone had to take this slot and so I accept it with good grace and invite you, the community, to join us nevertheless, to discuss the challenges and opportunities in scientific publication that confront us now, and in the coming decades.

To participate in the workshop you'll need to register for the meeting in the usual way, but to put your question to the panel on any topic connected with scientific publishing, you can just email it to me any time [howard.jacobs@tuni.fi]. The workshop will range over open-access, predatory journals, publication and research ethics, bibliometrics, pre-print servers, portable and transparent peer-review, specialized versus broad-interest journals, new formats and anything else you care to raise. I intend that it will also address *Drosophila*-specific issues, plus those affecting model organism research in general. Please join us.