

## INVITED EDITORIAL

## Reflecting on the COVID-19 pandemic and moving forward: Make it Matter

It would be an understatement to say that the past few years have been challenging. In addition to the devastating effects of COVID-19, public health measures affected how we interacted with our families, friends, and colleagues. Services for individuals with childhood-onset disability and their families required rapid shifts to remote or hybrid delivery,<sup>1</sup> while some families experienced a dramatic decline in access.<sup>2</sup> Disparities related to race that existed prior to the pandemic were magnified<sup>3</sup> and disabled children were disproportionately affected by school and health care disruptions.<sup>4</sup>

The pandemic demanded reliance on online technology as our main source of connection with colleagues. While online meetings increased opportunities to connect with colleagues remotely, they also left many people craving the ad hoc, in-depth conversations that tend to be absent online. In 2019, it was unthinkable that we would be cancelling all in-person meetings and moving the American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (AAPDM) annual meeting online for 2 years; the meetings that so many of us have come to rely on as an important connection to our colleagues with common clinical and research interests.

The prolonged pause created by the pandemic has also created opportunities for reflection and progress. Many programs and services are evaluating the continued role that telehealth will play in service provision. Augmenting in-person visits with remote appointments can reduce the need for families to travel and can offer care providers improved insight into the home and community contexts of families. Online meeting platforms will enable us to continue to connect with colleagues and increase efficiency of some meetings that previously required travel. Many of us have become acutely aware of how face-to-face interactions feed the energizing nature of human connection and collegial spirit.

We witnessed how the alignment of efforts in science can result in astounding progress with the development, evaluation, and administration of COVID-19 vaccines, from virus identification to the beginning of vaccine distribution, in 12 months.<sup>5</sup> While research related to childhood-onset disability will likely never experience the same level of urgency and unified global determination, the accomplishment demonstrates the extraordinary power of shared vision and efforts. The identification of research priorities and enhanced collaboration could expedite the development of the science that informs clinical practice, and useful clinical implementation tools and strategies. The pandemic has also enforced the importance of continued focus on the outcomes that matter to the children and families we serve. We must continue to give

primacy to the voices of individuals with childhood-onset disability and their families as we strive to learn how we can contribute to enhancement of inclusion, participation, and overall health and well-being. We must also remain dedicated to addressing disparities in access to health care and other services and supports that affect health and social outcomes.

The AAPDM has demonstrated resilience with the delivery of two very successful online meetings and continued productivity as a result of our hardworking staff, committees, and board of directors. This resilience is something we should be very proud of; while not unexpected, it confirms the dedication of our members to an organization they clearly believe in. This year, our AAPDM meeting planning team is excited to contribute to the in-person 76th Annual Meeting of the AAPDM in Las Vegas, Nevada, 21st to 24th September 2022. The theme of the meeting is 'Make it Matter.' We hope you will join us to continue our reflections on how we can embrace the lessons we have learned over the past few years to face future challenges and opportunities.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Not required.

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