

I recently attended a memorial service for my undergrad mentor, Pete Thompson. I met him as a sophomore and worked in his lab the rest of my time at Swarthmore. He showed us every day that science is more than just reading a textbook and working problems until your answer matches the answer key. There's no answer key for the questions we are pursuing. To identify the best approach, we need to work together.

This memory of Pete is particularly poignant now as we've spent many months trying to do science by Zoom. It's a useful tool, but it will never be an adequate substitute for the personal interaction in the lab and in the convention center. Those spontaneous conversations in the Java House or in the seemingly-endless coffee queue at SfN really drive our science forward, and they just don't happen the same way when every interaction is scheduled and comes with a Zoom link.

Don't get me wrong—there are definite advantages to our newfound facility with virtual meetings. This fall, **Bengi Baran** put together a terrific mini-symposium on sleep with presenters from Zurich, Wales, and Los Angeles—a group that would have been difficult to bring together in person in Iowa.

The image is a screenshot of a Zoom meeting. On the left, a woman with glasses and a beige scarf is speaking. The main part of the screen shows a presentation slide titled "What does REM do for memory?". The slide includes a diagram of a hand pressing a button labeled "video display" and "press". Below the diagram is a timeline showing "REM" and "REM" with arrows. The slide text reads: "What does REM do for memory?", "Early work implicated REM in procedural memory consolidation, especially tasks like finger tapping (Smith, 1962; Crife, 2003; Korn et al., 2016)", and "Sleep features supporting emotional memory resolution across ages and sexes". The presenter is identified as "Gina R. Poe, Ph.D.". Logos for "UCLA" and "Semel UCLA" are visible at the bottom. A smaller slide is visible in the bottom left corner, titled "Sleep and brain maturation: from descriptive studies to a neuromodulation approach" by Reto Huber, University Children's Hospital, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Psychiatric Hospital, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

This was especially true for Penny Lewis of Cardiff University, a new mother, who recorded her scientific presentation in advance and took questions live while holding her infant. Here, Zoom definitely removed barriers to interaction! Next month we'll have another mini-symposium, planned by **Marie Gaine** and **Sam Young** and focused on epigenetics. Mark your calendars for Dec. 3 at noon for presentations by Simon Hippenmeyer of IST Austria, Andrew Groves of Baylor College of Medicine, and Elizabeth Heller of University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. I am especially looking forward to Elizabeth Heller's talk as she started her career as an undergraduate researcher in my lab at Penn.

The mini-symposium also represents how we learned to modify and adapt our former practices to better fit the new reality. I find that the shorter talks help to mitigate Zoom fatigue. Even

though we're all accustomed to listening to hour-long talks in person, it's much more difficult to sustain that level of concentration for a computer screen. After an hour, I can hardly see straight!

It really is terrific to be back together at least some of the time. It's true that we don't always know what we've got until it's gone. The necessity of isolation really crystallized for me the importance of interaction with colleagues, friends, and family. As we break next week for the Thanksgiving holiday, I hope we all will take a moment to savor those personal connections with whomever we are fortunate enough to spend time.

Ted

Ted Abel
(he/him/his)
Director, Iowa Neuroscience Institute
Chair and DEO, Department of Neuroscience & Pharmacology
Roy J. Carver Chair in Neuroscience
Editor-in-Chief, Neurobiology of Learning and Memory
Carver College of Medicine, University of Iowa



@TedAbelneuro