

# A festival of international conferences on caregiving, disability, aging and technology

Geoff Fernie PhD

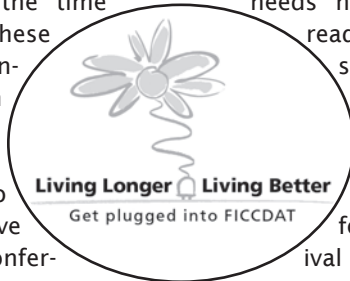
Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, Toronto, Canada

E: fernie.geoff@torontorehab.on.ca

*G. Fernie, A festival of international conferences on caregiving, disability, aging and technology. Gerontechnology 2006; 4(4):185-186.* The Festival is an innovative approach to bringing delegates together from a wider range of interests to address technology and aging from many perspectives. Delegates will be able to register in one of five major international conferences that will run concurrently with compatible themes. Opportunities for delegates and speakers to attend sessions in other conferences will be provided. This ambitious format is designed to reach beyond the accepted theme of multidisciplinary to embrace greater collaboration between topic areas. It promises to be a feast for gerontechnologists.

**Keywords:** conference, caregiving, technology, aging, neuroscience, disability

Gerontechnology exists because of the movement toward multi-disciplinary research. Traditional disciplinary silos have largely been broken down. However, often we see researchers attending the same conferences and creating silos around topics. We think the time has come to break down these topic silos. The Festival of International Conferences on Caregiving, Disability, Aging and Technology (FICCDAT) is designed to achieve this by staging five important international conferences concurrently and encouraging interactions between the different conferences under the banner of the Festival.



and Appropriate.

The Second ICTA will further explore how technology can contribute to a positive quality of life as we age. This conference is at the core of gerontechnology and needs no additional explanation to readers of this journal. Simply, submit your abstracts and come! In addition we expect a North-American chapter of the International Society of Gerontechnology to be formed during the 2007 festival of gerontechnology conferences, in order to further spread the main message of gerontechnology: Technology serving an aging society.

## ICTA

We organized the First ICTA (International conference on technology & aging) in 2001<sup>1</sup>. It brought together experts and senior consumers, and explored how technology could contribute to a positive quality of life. It also included the insight that older people are eager to accept technologies that meet their needs and will use them when they are explained effectively. The 5 A's were introduced: Affordable, Accessible, Attractive, Available

## GROWING OLDER WITH A DISABILITY

This is an area of special interest for gerontechnologists. For the first time, people with disabilities are growing older and are encountering the common problems of aging. Imagine being a manual wheelchair user who now has arthritis or a blind person who has depended on her memory who now forgets the details of a route. How do those who are already disabled cope with increased impairments as they grow older?

## ADVANCES IN NEUROREHABILITATION

The occurrence of brain injury (such as stroke) and neurodegeneration increases dramatically as people age. Such brain disorders typically result in profound disruptions to an individual's ability to engage in the activities of daily life. New understanding and technological advances are leading a revolution in therapeutic approaches to repairing and/or minimizing disability and maximizing function and well-being following brain injury. We think that readers of Gerontechnology will be eager to keep pace with rapid developments in this area.

## CAREGIVERS, ESSENTIAL PARTNERS IN CARE

Often researchers focus on the needs of the older person with an impairment. However, the needs of caregivers are equally important. This conference will increase understanding of these needs. Caregivers are women, men, daughters, brothers, in-laws, parents, spouses and neighbours. For example, there are at least 2.9 million family caregivers in Canada. While care giving is often personally rewarding, many caregivers experience injury, isolation, fear, job loss, illness and/or anxiety about the future. This conference will explore social policy environments in different countries related to the support of caregiving as well as technological and other interventions to assist caregivers.

## IMPROVING MEDICAL DEVICE USABILITY

The 30<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Canadian Medical and Biological Engineering Society (CMBES) will be held in Toronto, Ontario on June 16-19, 2007. The theme will be Improving Medical Device Usability. The theme will be on current research activities relating to improving ease of use of increasingly complex and physically shrinking technologies, and the potential impact of applying usability principles to the design and selection of medical devices. CMBES has been founded in 1965, and officially published in 1998<sup>2</sup>

the Clinical Engineering Standards of Practice in Canada.

## A FEAST FOR GERONTECHNOLOGISTS

Many invited keynote speakers will also present a talk to a second conference of their choice in a style suitable to the anticipated audience. Also all registrants to a conference will be granted admission to one session per day in each of the other conferences. Moreover, there will be a common tradeshow exhibition and poster areas. Social events will be shared to encourage formation of new friendships. We believe that Gerontechnologists will have an amazing time with opportunities to learn about: (i) the special problems encountered by people with disabilities who are now living to old age, (ii) dramatic new discoveries employing technology to rehabilitate people with strokes and head injuries, (iii) the application of ubiquitous computing to support the shift of health care from hospitals to home, and (iv) the special needs of caregivers for assistive technologies.

All papers and posters will be peer-reviewed and proceedings will be published. There will be a number of pre-conference events including a special workshop exploring opportunities for greater collaboration through the expansion of national research consortia to include more international members.

The whole event breathes the atmosphere of a Festival and will undoubtedly be a feast for gerontechnologists. Please watch [www.ficcdat.ca](http://www.ficcdat.ca) for news and plan to join us in Toronto from 16 to 19 of June, 2007.

## References

1. Fernie GR, Milner M. An eventful conference. *Gerontechnology* 1(2):119-121;2001
2. CMBES. *Clinical Engineering Standards of Practice in Canada*. Orleans: CMBES; 1998; available from [cmbes@magma.ca](mailto:cmbes@magma.ca)