

## **South West Clinical Senate Assembly Annual Conference 2019**

**7<sup>th</sup> March 2019, Exeter, UK**

George Bernard Shaw once wrote “beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance”.

This was one of the quotations on display to greet delegates as they arrived at the Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel for the South West Clinical Senate Assembly’s Annual Conference, which was themed this year on three types of knowledge: research, data and experience.

There was a tangible air of expectation as the first speaker, Kevin Fong, got the day under way with a thought-provoking presentation which mixed references to the Shawshank Redemption and Top Gun with constant references to academic journals and evidence from across the world.

An astrophysicist and consultant anaesthetist, Dr Fong boasts an impressive CV and spoke about his incredible journey from signing up to medical school (“how hard can it possibly be?”) to his experiences working with NASA.

He drew parallels in his talk between the similar approach to risk and safety at both NASA and the NHS, and asked the question: “Why don’t doctors behave more like pilots?”

Dr Fong was one of a number of heavyweight speakers who packed the agenda at this year’s conference and had the room buzzing with questions and conversation throughout the day.

The issue of workforce - a familiar underlying theme at the Senate’s meetings - was tackled by the Nuffield Trust’s Director of Policy Candace Imison, who asked the question “if workforce is the problem, why isn’t it the solution?” in her detailed and thought-provoking talk.

Over lunch, many of the conversations weren’t just about the speakers, but also about Pepper the robot, who engaged with delegates and helped to raise awareness of the potential for how robots could be used in health and social care.

Following the break a very lively, powerful and personal talk on mental health was given by Sarah Emmott who talked about being diagnosed with ADHD in her 30s and her experiences since.

The final speaker, comedy writer and former doctor Adam Kay, read extracts from his best-selling book, *This is Going to Hurt*, which he said he wrote as a trojan horse, using comedy to highlight the pressures junior doctors were facing.

Kay spoke candidly about his experiences in medicine, revealed that he missed being a doctor “terribly”, and stressed how healthcare professionals (“amazing people”) needed to share their experiences and talk about what they’d been through much more.

The final word on the day went to Chair Sally Pearson, who underlined the need for clinicians to get some headspace to talk with each other away from the pressures of their day job, to share knowledge, expertise and understanding.

If time away from the workplace in this kind of setting helps to make the health system work better, then it’s time well spent for all health professionals - and would perhaps move everyone a step further away from the false knowledge that Shaw warned about.