

Monday 24 August 2020

## Virtual Reality: Interning at the World Health Organization during a pandemic

As coronavirus was declared a pandemic, media, organisations and the public looked to the World Health Organization (WHO) for information. Joyce Haddad, Accredited Practising Dietitian, had just commenced an internship at WHO Headquarters in Switzerland, and was there to see it all unfold.

Speaking today at the [Dietitians Australia Virtual Plenary Program](#), Joyce shares insights into her role within the WHO Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, and highlights how food plays such an integral role in our lives.

“Part of my role was supporting the WHO COVID-19 Nutrition and Food Safety Working Group. Once the pandemic was declared, we were soon inundated with queries, as WHO’s Member Countries, global organisations and media sought guidance on a very wide spectrum of issues related to COVID-19, nutrition, food safety and health,” said Joyce.

“This included every aspect of food – from harvesting issues to the safety of wet markets and protection of seasonal food system workers, through to how to manage food fortification programs, and food assistance at refugee camps. There were questions about food trade and virus transmission, and if breastfeeding with COVID-19 was still safe. This pandemic really highlighted the key role food and nutrition has across so many sectors.”

When Joyce started her internship in February, she was looking forward to working within an organisation that could positively influence global health. But she never could have imagined just how much impact her role would have.

“This was a novel virus – we were learning, so we could then inform the world. With many countries in lockdown, unsure of what would happen next, it was not only Ministries of Health, but media and the public who were turning to WHO for answers. Great care was taken to ensure the most accurate information was provided, to maintain credibility in such an unprecedented time,” said Joyce.

Reflecting on her WHO internship, Joyce encourages us to work together to strive for better health.

“Each and every person plays a part in achieving better health for their community – and COVID-19 is just one example of this. Through physical distancing, hygiene and other healthy practices, we must continue to work together to slow the spread of coronavirus,” said Joyce.

“There are so many aspects that contribute to food and nutrition, from agriculture, access and affordability of food through to nutrition services in health systems, adequate and accessible care and personal choice. We all need to unite to help achieve better health through good nutrition.”

After her internship contract was extended twice, and multiple rescheduled flights, Joyce has recently returned to Australia to complete the mandatory two-week quarantine requirements.

“While the prospect of quarantine was daunting, focusing on what I had, rather than what I didn’t, helped get me through. Finding nourishing ways to look after my mental health was really important, such as keeping up a daily routine and regularly speaking to family and friends. After working with and learning from many low to middle income countries, it was hard to complain about anything – living in Australia is a privilege,” said Joyce.

**ENDS**

**For media enquiries and interviews, contact Pattie King, Dietitians Australia 0409 661 920**

*Dietitians Australia and the associated logo is a trademark of the Dietitians Association of Australia.*

**Note to Editors:** Dietitians Australia (DA) is the leading voice of nutrition in Australia, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia. For more information, including DA’s media releases and position on topical nutrition issues, visit [www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au).

## About the Dietitians Australia Virtual Conference Plenary Program:

In face of the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19, Dietitians Australia is hosting a virtual plenary program across 24-26 August 2020, in lieu of our annual face to face conference. For more details, visit <https://bit.ly/331DFdK>. Follow us on Twitter [@dietitiansaus](https://twitter.com/dietitiansaus) and join the conversation using #DA2020.

Virtual press passes are available for interested media to attend plenary sessions. To request a press pass, please contact Pattie King, ph: 0409 661 920.

---

## Joyce's tips for living well during quarantine

After recently completing 2 weeks of mandatory hotel quarantine and now undergoing an additional 2 weeks of self-quarantine interstate, Joyce shares her top tips to look after your overall health.

### 1. Set up a routine for each day

Rather than counting down the hours (which can make the days seem even longer!), having a routine can help regain some feeling of normalcy.

"Upon returning to Australia, I'm continuing my PhD work, so scheduling in a few virtual meetings helped me feel like I was using my time productively. I regularly spoke with family and friends and aimed to eat meals at a similar time each day, to help get myself back into my usual routine," said Joyce.

### 2. Get active – and make the most of what you have

While you might not have access to all the equipment you're used to, it's a chance to be creative with what you've got.

"I'm someone who loves to be active, so the thought of being confined to a hotel room was daunting. While I wasn't able to go for a run, I still clocked up to 10,000 steps daily by finding YouTube workout videos to play on my hotel room TV. Whether you're into dance classes, cardio sessions, workouts or yoga – there's plenty to choose from. All you need is to clear some floor space and a little bit of enthusiasm," said Joyce.

### 3. Connect virtually with friends over a meal

Connecting with others is so important – particularly when you're quarantining alone. While it can be hard to catch friends or family in the middle of the day, a phone or video call to share a meal together is a great way to catch up.

### 4. Ask for help

This year has been full of change – and it's so important to ask for help when you need it. Whether you reach out to friends, family, or a health care professional – seeking support is really important in looking after your health.

"The prospect of quarantine was really playing on my mind. Speaking to the nurses from border security at the airport helped to allay my initial concerns," said Joyce.

"While the hotel provided adequate food, I appreciated having family who could drop off foods that I was really missing - like fresh fruit and vegetables (which I could steam in the microwave in my room). I enjoy cooking and preparing food, and social support allowed me to continue this within the confines of a hotel room. Finding ways to look after your mental health, like the simple act of asking for help, where possible, is really important in times like these."