Since the School’s inception seven years ago, we have funded 240 primary care research projects and supported 71 trainees through their studies and fellowships.

Our focus continues to have a positive impact on primary care practice, policy, research and capacity building among the future leaders of primary care research. Recent publications in The Lancet Respiratory Medicine, the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) are evidence of the wide reach of School’s research. They are indicative of the School’s fortunate position of being able to select trainees from a number of high quality applicants. The research outputs add confidence and credibility to the excellent research produced by the School and the NIHR.

The well attended SPCR training event in September was testament to the steady increase in trainee numbers across our academic departments over the years.

Training Leads commented on the enthusiasm and level of discussion around a range of research topics – each at varying stages of completion – in the presentations they facilitated. Trainees have attended a number of external training events and conferences during the past year and encouraging feedback from these can be found on page 4.

Other School highlights include the refinement and implementation of a Public and Patient Involvement policy in line with the NIHR’s objective to encourage involvement from patients and members of the public in all aspects of the research process. Two of our largest research projects, the Cancer Diagnosis Decision rules (CANDID) and the Benefits of Aldosterone Receptor Antagonism in Chronic Kidney Disease (BARACK D), have generated media interest since they commenced in 2012. Updates on these projects on page 7.

The School launched a new website in August (www.spcr.nihr.ac.uk) and a twitter feed (@NIHRSPCR), and is well placed to keep abreast of research and policy engagements, and to communicate these to our members. Preparation is underway for this year’s SPCR Showcase which will be run back to back with the SPCR Trainees’ Event in Oxford in September. We hope to give researchers, trainees and healthcare professionals an excellent opportunity to engage in discussions in primary care research. Look out for the call for abstracts on our website.

Richard Hobbs
NIHR SPCR Director
SAPC North, trainee of the year...

SPCR doctoral student Abigail Methley (University of Manchester) was awarded the Society for Academic Primary Care (SAPC), North, Early Career Researcher prize in November 2013. The prize recognised the research Abi has done towards her PhD entitled ‘Experiences of mental health support for people with Multiple Sclerosis: What can the concept of candidacy contribute to our understanding of care?’ Awarded to people with less than three years’ research experience, the title gives Abi complementary registration to the SAPC Annual Scientific Meeting in Edinburgh in July this year. Abi has just started her third year of a NIHR SPCR funded PhD at the University of Manchester. Her research qualitatively investigates the experiences of people with Multiple Sclerosis in healthcare services, and the corresponding experiences and perceptions of their health care providers.

Is it safe to wake up?

In June 2013, James Sheppard won the Alberto Ferrero prize for best poster at the European Society for Hypertension and Cardiovascular Protection Annual Meeting in London for his poster “Is it safe to wake up?” The presentation was based on a SPCR study “Defining the prognostic value of the morning blood pressure surge in clinical practice”, a collaborative study with Richard McManus (University of Oxford), James A Hodgkinson, Richard Riley and Una Martin (University of Birmingham).

Trainee Awards in 2013

New projects

Proactive familial breast cancer risk assessment in primary care: feasibility of an optimised intervention to improve identification and care of women at risk (Phase 1 & 2)

Alyson Hunt, Bristol

Primary care patients’ views and experiences of treatments for depression, and of those delivering their care: a secondary analysis of qualitative data

George Downesswell, Birmingham

Pain App I & II - validity and utility

Danielle Van der Windt, Keele

An analytical framework for increasing the efficiency and validity of research using primary care databases

Evan Kontopantelis, Manchester

Modelling the cost effectiveness of prescribing safety indicators to identify those that are likely to be most cost-effective for inclusion in a roll out of the PINCER trial intervention

Sarah Rodgers, Nottingham

Improving outcomes for stroke survivors in the community and in care homes: adherence to guidance in primary care

Daniela Goncalves, Oxford

How has the GP management of depression changed since 2006? Exploring the effects of the QOF, the economic recession, and NICE guidelines, on rates of diagnosis, antidepressant prescribing and referrals for depression

Tony Kendrick, Southampton

Patient participation in UG medical education in general practice (Pat Med)

Sophie Park, UCL

Blood pressure surges at NAPCRG

At the North American Primary Care Research Group (NAPCRG) annual meeting in Ottawa in November, James Sheppard (University of Oxford) presented the findings of his SPCR systematic review ‘Examining the morning surge in blood pressure’. He was appreciative of the opportunity to present to and develop links with primary care researchers working in similar areas to his own. Noteworthy presentations included Andrew Murphy’s follow up on secondary prevention of heart disease, and Ranit Mishori’s poster examining the credibility of daytime TV advice from doctors.

After the event, James commented: “The conference had a distinctly international flavour, particularly evident in the poster sessions where the contrast in the way healthcare systems from different countries are organised was striking. This gave me a new perspective on my research and how it might better be disseminated for researchers around the world. The conference as a whole was very engaging, particularly the poster sessions which were well attended and stimulated a lot of discussion and debate. Our Canadian hosts were extremely welcoming and I very much hope to return to and further explore the potential for greater collaboration with other members of the SPCR community.”
Better Knowledge for Better Health

SPCR fellow Helen Atherton (University of Oxford) and doctoral student Jasmin Knopp (University of Manchester) presented their research at the Cochrane Colloquium in Quebec in September 2013. The conference theme focussed on how evidence informs health care decisions at every level. Helen and Jasmin spoke about their experiences after the event.

Jasmin: “The sessions went beyond Cochrane reviews to consider alternative approaches and interesting methods and review topics which don’t currently form part of the Cochrane spectrum of reviews. There were opportunities to learn about qualitative review methods and the role of qualitative work in informing the interpretation of quantitative review findings.”

Adding value in research

Doctoral student Grace Moran (University of Birmingham) presented her poster “How minor are minor strokes?”, at the 7th Annual NIHR trainees event in Leeds in November and reported: “The theme of the event was ‘making value in research’ and trainees were encouraged to avoid waste in research at every level. We were taught to think creatively about our research, learn from other researchers of the many career professionals who have succeeded in their chosen field, without compromising the work/life balance. The camp was a ‘great opportunity to practice skills in presenting and responding to criticism and questions on the spot,’ said Abi. Her group won the ‘Best Patient and Public Engagement and Involvement Strategy’ award while Derek’s group (photographed below) received the ‘First Prize for Overall Proposal’, giving them £3million ‘funding award.’

Developing a post-doctoral career

By supporting the career progression of NIHR doctoral students, the annual NIHR Experimental Medicine Research Training Camp provides participants with scientific and research skills vital for developing proposals, communicating with team members and forming successful research collaborations.

The 2013 training camp focussed on a ‘call for proposals’ from a fictitious funding body to develop research infrastructure. Participants worked in groups, alongside a mentor, to build a research programme and multi-disciplinary team. Their proposals were then presented to a panel of experts who assessed them for fundability.

Abi and Derek, from the universities of Oxford and Birmingham respectively, spoke about the pressures of the session. “It was very stimulating and fast paced with various deadlines for developing presentations, leaflets, lay summaries and opportunities to attend lectures and arrange meetings with different experts and ideas.”

Guest speakers Professors Ashley Adamson and Anne Schilder (Winners of the first NIHR Professorships) addressed the group with accounts of the career progression of decision makers. They emphasised the importance of different disciplines within each team was a great strength of the camp.”

Recent Publications


A systematic review of predictors and moderators of response to psychological therapies in OCD. Do we have enough empirical evidence to target treatment? Kahya KM, Clare I, Bee P, Lovell K, Bower P. Clinical Psychology Review, December 2013


Suitability of emergency department attenders to be assessed in primary care: survey of general practitioner agreement in a random sample of triage records analysed in a service evaluation project. Thompson MW, Lasserran S, McCann T, Thompson M, Henehan C. BMJ Open, December 2013


The overall winning team at the NIHR Experimental Medicine Doctoral Research Training Camp (from right to left): Radha Desai (UCLH BRC), Bushra Ahmed (BRU Royal Brompton Respiratory), ZinZin Hame (BRU Leister Diabetes), Marianne Johnstone (BRU Liverpool Gastrointestinal), Derek Kyte (NIHR School for Primary Care Research) and Alendra Pender (BRC Royal Marsden) photographed with Professor Dave Jones (NIHR Lead for Academic Training, Chair of the Infrastructure Training Forum).

Abi Eccles
University of Oxford

When I began my doctoral studies to explore the information and decision support needs of people with multiple sclerosis, Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) had not really crossed my mind. However, a year into my studies during a PPI INOLVE workshop at the NIHR SPCR trainee event, I was enlightened to its potential value and inspired to incorporate PPI into my research. With the support of my supervisors, I developed a plan to recruit six members of the public with long term conditions to a PPI group which would provide input for my research at various stages. Using guidance from the INOLVE website and knowledge gained from the workshop, I devised a role description outlining planned activities, expectations and the desired attributes that members would possess. This role description was distributed to interested members of the public before they decided whether or not to participate. Taking a novel approach, I designed the PPI group to exist online with a secure website to host information on the research and the activities participants can volunteer to carry out. Members can ask questions through the website or contact me at any time by email or phone. The online element allows flexibility for PPI members and ensures research collaborative activities can be carried out as and when it is convenient. The costs of organising meetings are avoided and involvement is more accessible for those who have disabilities or other responsibilities which may have disallowed face-to-face meetings difficult.

Input from PPI members is gained by designing ‘activities’ to complete online. They are invited to take part and are reimbursed for their time on receipt of completed worksheets. Activities to date have included providing feedback on research data collection design; amending recruitment literature, participant information and consent forms; carrying out qualitative analysis on an excerpt of interview data (to act as an audit against my own analysis); and identifying which outcomes should be considered most important in a systematic review. It has been great working with the public and gaining early insights from the people who I am ultimately doing the research for. They have improved the quality of my recruitment information, provided conceptual

Abi Eccles
University of Oxford

SPCR doctoral students Abi Eccles and Derek Kyte were prize winners after representing the School at the fourth NIHR Experimental Medicine Research Training Camp in Berkhampstead in July 2013.
Supporting patients with diabetes

Andrew Farmer

The first strand of this study explores the impact of interventions targeted at medication adherence, and the second strand investigates telehealth to support self-management of patients with diabetes twelve months after randomisation.

The study’s importance lies in the fact that there remains few reliable data on interventions that improve patient adherence to their medicines, which increases the potential impact of this ongoing work. Importantly, the technology under investigation in this work could also apply to chronic conditions beyond diabetes. The change in glycaemic control and prescription of medication over a period of twelve months was assessed, as well as the levels of glycaemic control and the prescribing of medication.

Strand 1 looks at adherence and includes the follow up of the MRC funded Support and Advice for Medication Study (SAMS) cohort, a study of an alternative electronic medication monitor, and development work for a pragmatic trial with Cambridge. The work shows that a simple adherence measure improves tablet taking behaviour. Work on developing a future trial is in progress, building on the work in the SAMS trial. This has led to a collaboration with Exeter University on the MRC Stratified Medicine Initiative on Diabetes, where the expertise we have built in the Department of Primary Care Health Sciences has been used to recruit medication adherence research participants to our telemedicine trials exploring whether the response to different glucose lowering drugs varies between individuals.

Strand 2 continues work with telemedicine with a series of studies to evaluate the use of the m-health platform (mobile phone based telemedicine) in providing support for people with diabetes, in collaboration with Professor Lionel Tarassenko at the Institute of Biomedical Engineering. A pilot study with 23 participants showed acceptability and feasibility of using the system to support people titrating insulin without regular practice visits. This study has been extended to a Wellcome Trust funded investigation of a mobile health platform to monitor people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

In addition, the work has been extended to inform the design of a trial with people treated for hypertension, in a low income setting in South Africa. This brings together the work outlined in Strand 2 as the intervention is based on text messaging.

Funding was also provided for statistical support to develop methods for evaluating and exploring monitoring in diabetes. The work has been carried out on databases from previous trials. The methods developed have enabled us to determine optimal measurement intervals originally developed by Irwig and Glasziou to take account of the initial distribution of values in the population. The expertise developed has been used within an NHS HTA funded programme of work on renal monitoring in diabetes, and an NHS Diabetes grant to extend the work on optimal management of glycaemic.

Evidence, Engagement and Elves?: Blogging for the Mental Elf website

Sarah Knowles
University of Manchester

If I had to make a list of ‘things I like’, then the internet, mental health research and feminist puns would all rank quite highly. It’s no surprise then that I’ve been a follower of the Mental Elf website since it’s beginning. The blog was started in May 2011 by André Tomlin, an Information Scientist, and it aims to “highlight evidence-based publications relevant to mental health practice in the UK and further afield”. I began blogging for the site myself last year, partly to work on my writing skills, but also to contribute to the effort to disseminate research findings more widely.

Engagement and dissemination are increasingly prioritised in health services research (HSR). Trials and systematic reviews are the bread and butter of what we do in HSR, but the evidence base can be hard to engage with. The Mental Elf website provides accessible summaries of the latest studies, written by authors ranging from Masters students to professors, who read the original paper itself and summarise the results. I think this is a core part of its success – people can rely on it for information rather than promotion. This is reflected in the feedback, which includes health and information professionals through to service users and patients.

If you had asked me in 2011 if there would be a big audience for daily summaries of health research papers, I would probably have said “If only.” The success of the site, and its relevance, importance, and interesting beyond academia. It also reassured me that the kind of work we do in the School is relevant, important, and interesting beyond academia. It also gave me a lot of reassurance that the kind of work we do in the School is relevant, important, and interesting beyond academia. Evans confirmation to me that the School is working hard for research to be accessible to patients.

Where did you complete your studies?
Completed my Masters and PhD at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), probably the most prestigious HE institution in Greece.

How did you first hear of the School for Primary Care Research?
I was fortunate to be in Manchester when the School was founded in 2006 and worked at the National Primary Care Research and Development Centre as it was then called.

What was the topic of your Fellowship research?
A researcher at the Centre for Primary Care, University of Manchester, Evan studied in Athens and grew up in nearby Piraeus. He joined the School as a Fellow in 2010, and has since completed a PhD investigating QoF indicator removal, diabetes and exception reporting, as well as Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD) methodology. Evan is a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society and Secretary for the Manchester group.

What did you complete your PhDs?
I completed my Masters and PhD at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), probably the most prestigious HE institution in Greece.

How do you keep your work relevant to primary care practitioners?
I excelled in mathematics as a child and was interested in computer programming. I remember weekends typing basic code from a book into my Commodore 64 to run games. At university, I became interested in biostatistics through an influential lecturer and my PhD used health care data.

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Who do you think are important mentors?
There are many mentors who have supported me over the years, including my PhD supervisor Professor Chris Glasziou, my supervisor Professor Imad Husain, and my colleagues at the School for Primary Care Research, including Dr. Sarah Knowles and Dr. Evan Kontopantelis.

What advice do you have for SPCR Fellows and students?
I think the most important advice is to be open-minded and willing to learn from others. It is also important to be persistent and not give up easily. Finally, it is important to have a good work-life balance and to take care of yourself.

BARACK D

Jointly funded by the NIHR School for Primary Care Research and the NIHR Health Technology Assessment Programme, The Beneﬁts of Aldosterone Receptor Antagonist in obstructive kidney disease (CANDID) is the largest primary care based chronic kidney disease (CKD) trial conducted to date. Within seven recruitment centres across the country, CANDID D aims to determine whether an established cardiovascular medication, spironolactone, can reduce cardiovascular risk and the decline in renal function through 120 GP practices recruiting 2616 patients.

Although cardiovascular disease is a major cause of morbidity and death in CKD, few therapies have proved effective in modifying increased cardiovascular disease risk or the rate of renal decline. Increased cardiovascular events and rate of progression to end stage renal failure in patients with CKD is a major cause of increased mortality and morbidity with the resultant high cost to healthcare. To date, no large study of aldosterone receptor antagonists with renal or cardiovascular outcomes has been done. This collaborative project includes six of the eight SPCR member universities and is led by the Director of the School, Professor Richard Hobbs, University of Oxford.
SPCR opportunities

The International Primary Care Research Leadership programme (Brisbane)

The International Primary Care Research Leadership programme is designed to foster and develop future leaders in primary care research. The programme consists of three residential meetings in Oxford aimed to help participants explore different aspects of leadership in primary care research. Participants are encouraged to identify their own development needs, form peer learning sets and establish a two year follow up programme. They are provided with access to current leaders in primary care research, experts in strategic leadership and one-to-one coaching. The School funds two places per year.

Transdisciplinary Understanding and Training on Research - Primary Health Care

TUTOR-PHC is a one year, national interdisciplinary research training program funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) and the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF) with representation from the disciplines of: Family Medicine, Nursing, Psychology, Epidemiology, Social Work, Sociology, Education and many others. The SPCR is fortunate to be allocated one place on the programme each year. Further details about SPCR opportunities can be found on our website: www.spcr.nihr.ac.uk/trainees

Upcoming events

SPCR Training Event
St Anne’s College, University of Oxford, 25 September, 2014

SPCR Showcase
Mathematical Institute, University of Oxford, 26 September 2014

NIHR opportunities

NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Co-ordinating Centre (NETSCC)
- Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) Programme
- Health Service and Delivery Research (HS&DR) Programme
- Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Programme
- Public Health Research (PHR) Programme

Find out more: www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/funding

NIHR Central Commissioning Facility (CCF)
- Invention for Innovation (i4i)
- Programme Grants for Applied Research (PGfAR)
- Programme Development Grants (PDG)
- Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB)

Find out more about NIHR CCF research calls and competitions, guidance notes and supporting information: www.ccf.nihr.ac.uk

NIHR Trainees Coordinating Centre (NIHR TCC)
- NIHR Fellowships (Doctoral, Post-Doctoral, Career Development, Senior Research, Transitional Research)
- NIHR Integrated Academic Training (ACF, CL, IPF and Clinician Scientist Schemes)
- NIHR Research Professorships
- NIHR Research Methods
- NIHR/HEE Clinical Academic Training for nurses and midwives (Doctoral, Clinical Lecturer, Senior Clinical Lecturer)
- NIHR/HEE Healthcare Science Research Fellowships (Doctoral, Post-Doctoral, Senior Clinical Lecturer)
- NIHR Clinical Trials Fellowships
- NIHR Knowledge Mobilisation Research Fellowships

Find out more about our awards and the funding available from NIHR TCC: www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk

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