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| Host department: QMUL |
| Project Title: |
| Understanding the role of offline and online social networks in asthma management through quantitative social network assessment.  |
| Proposed supervisory team:  |
| * Anna De Simoni, GP and Clinical Lecturer QMUL: expertise in primary care and online digital social interventions in long term conditions.
* Ivaylo Vassilev, Associate Professor within Health Sciences at the University of Southampton: expertise in sociology and networks methodologies for the study of chronic illness management.

 Other members of the supervisory team* Chris Griffiths, Professor of Primary Care, QMUL: expertise in asthma and respiratory disease interventions and evaluation.
* Prof Pietro Panzarasa, QMUL School of Business and Management: expertise in social network science, network analysis and structural foundations of social capital within networked communities.
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| Potential for cross consortium networking and educational opportunities: |
| This PhD is embedded within [AD HOC](https://www.ed.ac.uk/usher/aukcar/knowledge-hub/projects/ad-hoc) - a multidisciplinary NIHR Programme Grant for Applied Research (PGfAR). The AD HOC programme offers the student the opportunity to learn about a wealth of novel concepts and methods (such as social network analysis, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning) and how they intersect with more traditional elements, such as information governance, ethics, and medical law. The student will have access to world-leading collaborators from QMUL, University of Edinburgh, University of Cambridge, University of Nottingham, City, University of London, University of Surrey, St George’s, as well as Charity (Asthma UK-BLF) and Industry (HealthUnlocked) partners.The potential for cross-consortium networking is large – other consortium members are likely to be studying many of the above concepts and methods, but without the novel perspectives that on-line social communities provide.AD HOC is a key research programme within the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research ([AUKCAR](https://www.ed.ac.uk/usher/aukcar/knowledge-hub/projects/ad-hoc)) a UK-wide network of world-leading academics and partners, working collaboratively to improve treatment and care for people living with asthma. AUKCAR (now in its tenth year and co-led by QMUL) includes an outstandingly successful post- graduate platform and a novel clinical trials and methodology platform, both providing vibrant learning environments for AUKCAR-affiliated PhD students.  |
| Project description: |
| This PhD is complementary to the AD HOC programme. AD HOC itself seeks to determine whether engagement with an asthma online community promoted by primary care clinicians is effective and cost effective in improving asthma control, quality of life and other key outcomes. The overall aim of the PhD is to identify tool/s most suitable for use in primary care, evaluation of feasibility, acceptability and significance of data collected for patients with asthma and primary care teams. It does this by interacting with five phases of AD HOC: intervention development work; development of methods for the evaluation of a digital social intervention; analysis of existing asthma online community datasets to improve safety and effectiveness of engagement; an internal pilot and randomised controlled trial. The PhD candidate will be involved the development of the methodology for the evaluation of the proposed digital social intervention. The scope is to identify the optimal tool for mapping offline and online social networks of patients with asthma, their changes as result of the intervention and correlation with asthma control. The objectives of the PHD will be to:1. Explore existing web-based personal network survey tools for adults with asthma that can map both offline and online networks through a systematic review2. Explore through a qualitative study:* feasibility and acceptability of the identified best tool/s for use with patients in primary care settings.
* healthcare professionals’ and social prescribers’ perspectives on data collected through the tool in informing self-management and signposting to community care services.
* patient insight on the role of offline and online social network in asthma self-management gained through the tool

3. Correlate social network characteristics and measures with asthma control, quality of life, and other outcomes in a purposive sample of adults with asthma. The successful candidate will agree with the supervisors whether the PhD will take a broad approachencompassing all three objectives, or focus in greater depth on one or more of them (or indeedsub-questions within these broad objectives).The successful candidate will use a multi-method case study approach including a systematic review, qualitative study (interviews or focus groups) in a sample of practices and data analyses (univariate and multivariate logistic regression).It is envisaged that the successful candidate may also use quantitative analyses of, for example,characteristics of people whose social networks include online peers compared to those that do not, and characteristics of people who consider digital social interventions compared with those who do not. |
| Training and development provision by host: |
| *Formal training:* Bespoke training will be provided depending upon the learning needs and experience of the successful candidate. This will include attendance at training courses on qualitative and quantitative methods both within and outside the QMUL. The PhD student will also be encouraged to consider training courses that will benefit their wider development as an academic GP. |
| *Informal training:* The PhD will be carried out within a supportive multi-disciplinary environment that includes social network scientists, behavioural scientists, health economists, computer scientists, clinical expertise in nursing, general practice, and ethics. The wider research programme involves expertise both within the UK and internationally and collaborations with the charity and industry sectors. There are many opportunities to attend seminars and lectures within the Centre for Primary Care, the wider Department, the Wolfson Institute for Population Health, and the wider University. |
| *PPIE*: The research programme has established strong PPI/E links. We have a PPI co-applicant, who is a patient with asthma with online peer contacts within his social network. We also have independent PPI members in the programme steering committee who will be consulted on all aspects of the programme. We also consult existing AUKCAR PPI group (about 100 members nationwide). The successful applicant will be encouraged to make use of these existing PPI networks, but also to consider setting up new avenues for PPI/E as appropriate. |