



Megaphone Online

August 2016

the voice of Health Sciences' staff and students

Contract Researchers' Forum underway

On 12 July, 35 researchers and PhD students gathered to celebrate the inaugural event of the Contract Researchers' Forum. The event took place in 'The Kitchen @ Alcuin' and was introduced by Professor Tracy Lightfoot and Stephanie Prady.



The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and meet other researchers and PhD students in the department via a 'World Café Style' event. The discussions used five of the seven principle topics in the Concordat, an agreement between funders and employers of researchers in the UK. Of those attending, 94% rated the event good or excellent.

Suggestions for events going forwards included grant writing workshops; writing for REF reviewing; funding sources; negotiating contracts; deconstructing performance reviews; and applying for fellowships. If anyone would like to learn more about the group please contact Amanda Perry (amanda.perry@york.ac.uk) co-chair for communication.

More information and the Contract Researchers' Forum website can be found at: www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences/research/research-in-healthsciences/contract-researchers-forum.

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Student News

Student nurses speak out against tuition fee decision

Student nurses have spoken out about their dismay at the Government's decision to scrap bursaries and instead introduce tuition fees for nurses and midwives.

In an article in the York Press, a number of students voiced their concerns about the plans, and highlighted the dangers they feel this could pose to the nursing profession, and the NHS, in future.

The article is online at: http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/14654287.Trainee_nurses_in_York_speak_out_against___52_000_tuition_fee_decision/

Teaching News

Rail workshop at Festival of Ideas

Kelly Davies and Devi Nannen, both nursing lecturers in the department, recently took part in the York Festival of Ideas. They joined forces with Virgin Trains to create a workshop to encourage British children into science and engineering. The workshop gave children and their families a glimpse of the near-future of high speed train travel with a look at Virgin's new trains, capable of travelling at 140mph.

More information on the day can be found at <http://bit.ly/2aHfbHN>.

Humanitarian affiliation for the department

The Department of Health Sciences has recently become the first academic institute to be an affiliate member of the International Humanitarian Studies Association.

The affiliation came about due to work undertaken by Dr Jo Rose and Dr Janaka Jayawickrama who lead the MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs, and more information can be found at: www.ihsa.info/about/affiliate-institutions.



Jo Rose is pictured left, with Janaka Jayawickrama pictured right.



BMJ article for Alan Maynard

Alan Maynard, professor emeritus of health economics within the department, has had a head to head debate published in the BMJ. The article pits Alan against Michael Dixon, a GP from Devon, and asks the question, “should the NHS abolish the purchaser-provider split?”

The article can be viewed at www.bmj.com/content/354/bmj.i3825.

Drug prescribed to treat alcohol dependence could be ineffective

Researchers in the Department of Health Sciences found that a drug prescribed to treat alcohol dependence could be ineffective after a study found that the evidence-base was weak. Nalmefene was approved in Europe in February 2013 and was heavily marketed following approval by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. However, a study published in the journal ‘Addiction’ claims that there were several problems with the way that the clinical trials were conducted and raised concerns about the behaviour of the drug company, and the dilemmas posed for clinicians.

Professor Jim McCambridge, the Department of Health Sciences’ Chair in Addictive Behaviours and Public Health, joined researchers at the University of Stirling and other institutions to analyse the studies of Nalmefene that formed the basis for the licensing decision. They found that any possible effect on patients was small – a reduction of about one drink per day on average, if they exist. Side-effects were also more common in patients taking Nalmefene. Nalmefene is more expensive than similar drugs and no comparison with these alternatives has been made.

For more information visit www.stir.ac.uk/news/2016/06/weak-evidence-for-prescribed-drug/ or listen to an interview on BBC Radio Scotland on 6 June at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07cyl1k#play> (1 hr 14 in).

Does cardiac rehab favour the young over the old?

Researchers at the BHF Research Group in the Department of Health Sciences have been investigating whether cardiac rehabilitation programmes are inadvertently favouring younger patients over older ones in terms of reducing risk in cardiovascular disease.

The researchers, Patrick Doherty and Abdulrahman Al Quait, have published their findings in the journal *Open Heart*. They found that there were discrepancies between outcomes for people depending on their age. This is an important finding that patients, carers, health providers and health commissioners need to be aware of as it brings to light an inequality in NHS service outcomes for older patients. The researchers believe that more appropriate tailoring of cardiac rehabilitation services can help overcome this situation.

Born in Bradford awarded new research grant

A project that tracks the lives and health of more than 13,500 children across the city has been awarded a £3m grant to expand its research.

The grant, awarded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), ensures new studies will examine the health and wellbeing of at least 9,000 of the original Born in Bradford children, now aged between 7 and 10 years old.

Kate Pickett (pictured above right), Professor of Epidemiology in the Department of Health Sciences and the University's Research Champion for Justice and Equality, is leading the research on how children develop socially and emotionally.



Established in 2007, the Born in Bradford project is one of the largest medical research studies of its kind anywhere in the world.

The impetus for the research stemmed from Bradford's high infant mortality rates – which were double the national average – and a determination to tackle a raft of growing health issues in the city. The project aims to find out more about the causes of childhood illness by studying children from different cultures and backgrounds as their lives unfold.

More than 9,000 of the study's children - who were first recruited while their mothers were pregnant - will be asked, along with their 13,500 mothers and fathers, to complete new questionnaires about their lives, health and wellbeing.

The new data collected will provide a platform to support world-leading research across a wide range of areas. Read more at www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2016/research/born-in-bradford-grant/.

Public health researcher elected to British Academy

Public health researcher Professor Hilary Graham (pictured right) has been elected Fellow of the British Academy.

Professor Graham, who is a former Head of Department for Health Sciences, is among 42 UK academics elected as Fellows in recognition of their outstanding contribution to research. A second University of York Professor of Renaissance Literature, Brian Cummings, also got an award.

Professor Graham said: "This award recognises the significant importance that research into health

inequalities has in today's society. My work in this area would not have been possible without the support of colleagues from around the world, as well as our dedicated team of PhD students."

With a background in sociology and social policy research, Professor Graham is renowned for her work on social inequalities in health, with a particular focus on cigarette smoking and other health-related behaviours. Her research is also exploring the connections between public health and the biophysical environment.



Britain has the highest use of laughing gas in the world

Britain has the highest use of laughing gas in world – but is this ‘hippy crack’ dangerous? Ian Hamilton, lecturer in Mental Health, (pictured right) asked in an article for The Conversation website.

According to the latest Global Drug Survey, nitrous oxide – or laughing gas – is now the seventh most popular drug in 50 countries surveyed. Just over half the UK respondents said they had tried the drug at some point, and 38% said they had used it in the last year, making it more popular in the UK than any other country.

Nitrous oxide is a colourless, sweet tasting gas that has been used recreationally since the late 18th century, most notably by Sir Humphry Davy, former president of the Royal Society. Medical use was established in the early 20th century and nitrous oxide remains an important anaesthetic, tranquillizer and painkiller, used by dentists, obstetricians and sports doctors. Indeed, many members of the public will have experienced the effects of nitrous oxide themselves without realising it.

The popularity of recreational use of nitrous oxide is unsurprising. It’s legal in many parts of the world, it’s cheap and it reliably produces a short-lasting euphoria as well as heightened senses and a slight feeling of disconnect from the body and is often used as a drug at concerts, nightclubs and festivals.

The full article is available at: <https://theconversation.com/britain-has-the-highest-use-of-laughing-gas-in-world-but-is-this-hippy-crack-dangerous-61096>



Delirium research in care homes

Najma Siddiqi (pictured right) is a clinical senior lecturer in the Department of Health Sciences and Hull York Medical School. In a blog post for the British Geriatrics’ Society, she discusses her paper “The PiTSTOP study: a feasibility cluster randomized trial of delirium prevention in care homes for older people” which was published in the journal Age and Ageing.

Delirium (often called ‘Acute Confusional State’) is a common and serious illness among older people. It can be very distressing for patients, their families, and for healthcare staff; and can lead to worsening dementia, hospitalisation and death.

There is relatively little research on delirium in general, but this is particularly true of delirium in

the care home setting. This is despite the fact that residents of care homes are likely to be at particularly high risk of delirium by virtue of the high prevalence of dementia, older age, poor mobility and physical illness.

In the blog post, Dr Siddiqi discusses the challenges of delivering high-quality care in care homes, how delirium can be prevented, and the findings of the PiTSTOP study. Dr Siddiqi calls for a definitive trial of delirium prevention in long-term care and highlights the challenges that this sort of work will face.



Research News

Is cannabis getting stronger?

Cannabis is the world's favourite illicit drug but recent reports on increased potency have led to public health fears. How reliable is the evidence? And is cannabis really getting stronger?

In an article written for The Conversation website, Ian Hamilton, a lecturer in Mental Health in the Department of Health Sciences, addresses some of the long standing issues around cannabis and the harm posed to users. Ian points out the inconclusive nature of the available evidence, and discusses the arguments put forward on both sides of the debate. Ian also looks at the limiting factors on obtaining better evidence, such as the "massive data hole" caused by us not knowing if cannabis recovered from home seizures is a representative sample of the cannabis in circulation. In addition, the quality and sophistication of the cannabis testing procedures have improved over recent decades, but this means that seminal and widely quoted research is now out-of-date. Ian concludes by calling for a national survey of cannabis to not only provide information about the strength of the drug, but also how it is consumed in the population.

The article is online at: <https://theconversation.com/is-cannabis-really-getting-stronger-62574>.

Public Health Service 'ill-equipped' to provide treatment for cannabis users despite surge in numbers seeking help

Researchers argue that the lack of available treatment and understanding around cannabis dependency is a major public health concern, with users often being ignored

Ian Hamilton, lecturer in Mental Health, recently contributed to a news piece in The Independent following a successful conference on effective treatments for cannabis users held in York. Health experts have warned that the public healthcare system is unprepared and ill-equipped to provide help for cannabis users, despite a rapid increase in the number of people seeking treatment for problems relating to the drug.

Researchers gathering at a conference at the University of York highlighted the discovery of "concerning, unexpected" new symptoms reported by intensive users of cannabis and synthetic alternatives, including agitation and impulse control problems, contradicting the perception of cannabis as a suppressive drug.

One new study presented to the group demonstrated that while the use of cannabis has fallen in recent years, those smaller numbers of people are using the drug more intensively, with 73 per cent of all cannabis consumed by 9 per cent of users.

"We're effectively seeing a surge of people presenting for treatment but centres are not sure what to do with them," explained Ian Hamilton, a member of the research group. "It's like going in for heart surgery but finding the doctors don't have the necessary equipment to do it."

Read more at <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/nhs-ill-equipped-to-provide-help-for-cannabis-users-despite-surge-in-numbers-seeking-help-experts-a7102681.html>.

Funding secured for study to improve information for patients with chronic blood cancers

A team of researchers from the Department of Health Sciences has been awarded funding for a three year study to develop improved information resources to help patients and doctors make decisions about the management of chronic blood cancers (including chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, follicular lymphoma and myeloma).

Chronic blood cancers are complicated diseases that cannot be cured, but can be managed by active monitoring (known as 'watch and wait'), chemotherapy, or stem cell transplant. Scientific advances mean that increasing amounts of information about the risks and benefits of treatments is becoming available, including whether and when treatment is likely to be needed and how it might affect quality of life, as well as the duration of survival.

The study, which will be conducted by the Epidemiology and Cancer Statistics Group (ECSG), aims to develop appropriate resources (paper and electronic) to communicate this information to

clinical staff, as well as patients and relatives at a time when they feel ready to discuss such issues. These resources will promote shared decision-making, ensuring that treatment choices are aligned with the preferences of patients and their families.

The work, which is funded by a National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) programme grant for applied research, will involve the study team working closely with patients with these cancers, as well as their families and doctors and nurses, to explore their information needs and preferences. The resources developed will be evidence-based and targeted, taking into account the type of disease, how far it has progressed, treatment already received, and the patient's general health. The economic costs of different treatment decisions will also be taken into consideration.

The research will build on an existing patient cohort, the Haematological Malignancy Research Network (www.hmrn.org) which registers and monitors all patients with blood cancers diagnosed in Yorkshire and Humberside. The findings from the study will be used to inform practice nationwide.

York Trials Unit update

Belen Corbacho, health economist and research fellow in York Trials Unit (YTU), disseminated work relating to ProFHER trial at the XXXVI Spanish Association of Health Economics conference in Murcia (Spain) on the 15-17 June. She presented the paper "Cost-effectiveness of surgical versus non-surgical treatment of adults with displaced fractures of the proximal humerus: economic evaluation alongside the ProFHER trial". Belen also participated in a speaker's corner session where she discussed "Some tips for proper design and interpretation of clinical trials".

Eugena Stamuli, a health economist in YTU, attended the 15th Annual International Conference on Health Economics, Management

and Policy, organised by Athens Institute for Education and Research. The conference took place in Athens, Greece, from 20-23 June. Eugena presented a paper on: "Valuing the outcomes of a home visiting intervention for young mothers and their babies: a discrete choice experiment based on the evaluation of Family Nurse Partnership programme in England".

The presentation received a lot of interest and questions both due to the methods of research and the intervention involved. Eugena commented that the truly international nature of the conference and the multidisciplinary background of the delegates made participation in the event an interesting and enjoyable experience.

Hello

We wish a very warm welcome to new members of staff who have joined the department recently. These include: Imogen Featherstone, Sean Mackey, Wendy Ellis, and Amar Rangan.

Goodbye

Farewell to staff who have left us recently. These include: Laura Arundel, Min Tan, Joan Smith, Sasha Singh, and James Stovold.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Rachel Skipper and Cliff Riordan who have both achieved Fellowship of the Higher Education Authority. Demonstrating teaching quality is going to be really important for the department in the future as we move towards the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework and this will help that objective.

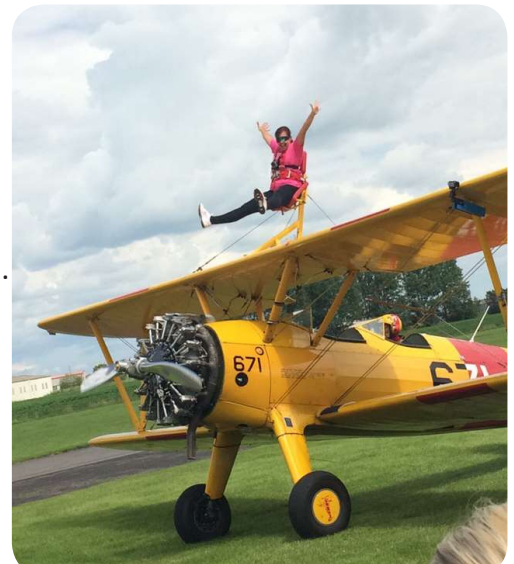
Congratulations also to staff who have been promoted recently. Hugh MacPherson is now a Chair, and Charlie Lloyd is a Reader.

Congratulations to Anne Phillips who has received a Queen's Nursing Award.

Kat Chatterton survives wing walk

On the 25 June 2016 Kat Chatterton, assistant research group administrator from York Trials Unit, completed a wing walk in aid of Cancer Research UK. The grand total is still to be confirmed, however, in excess of £650 was raised. Kat would like to thank everyone for the support given and generous donations received.

Kat is pictured right, on top of her plane.



If you would like to make a submission to future editions of Megaphone, please contact Nicola Thomis (nicola.thomis@york.ac.uk or tel 01904 321927).