



Megaphone Online

December 2021

the voice of Health Sciences' staff and students

Christmas message from Head of Department

"2021 is nearly over - which must rank as one of the toughest years yet for both staff and students.

That said our teaching and research continue to thrive and through our forward-looking approach we have created a strong platform for the year ahead.

This could not have happened without the continued support from our staff and students. I am so impressed by everyone's enthusiasm, commitment and would like to thank you for the valuable part you play in the success of the Department.

I hope that you all enjoy the festive season and please do take a break.

I wish you all good health and happiness now and throughout 2022."

Professor Patrick Doherty
Head of Department



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Department nominated for national award

The Department of Health Sciences was shortlisted for the Student Nursing Times Awards 2021 in the category of Best Student Experience.

The Student Nursing Times Awards celebrates the very best in nurse education, recognises and rewards brilliant educational establishments and honours those who are committed to developing new nursing talent as mentors, lecturers and providers of placements. The awards also pay tribute to students who have demonstrated the academic achievement, clinical prowess and personal qualities that will make them brilliant nurses.



Professor Paul Galdas, Professor of Nursing and Deputy Head of Department (Director of Teaching & Learning) said: “I was thrilled to hear that we had been shortlisted for the Best Student Experience category. The team within Health Sciences which includes academics, researchers and professional support staff, have worked hard to provide a fantastic student experience for those studying nursing or midwifery. The development of our new nursing programme in 2018 aligned to the new Nursing and Midwifery standards, enabled us to work with our existing students, listen to their views and take them into account when writing the new programme.”

Matthew Jacobs, Head of Student & Academic Services (Teaching & Learning) said: “As a team we are very proud to be shortlisted for this national nursing award. This is recognition of our commitment to providing an inclusive, accessible and innovative student experience at York. Our Departmental Student and Academic Support Service are at the very heart of the students support network whilst at university - this includes acting as a first point of contact and a referral “gateway” to the wider array of student support available. Alongside our Practice Education Support Team and Programmes Office, they are integral to the student experience and try to empower students to succeed in their journey and to achieve their full potential.”

The ceremony was held in London on 4th November and although the Department didn't win the award, we were thrilled to have been shortlisted.

First 'Baby Friendly' (BFI) qualification framework Leader's award

Congratulations to Louise Armstrong (Midwifery Lecturer) who has successfully completed the new Baby Friendly Initiative Leader qualification – BFIqL with a distinction!

The qualification has three different awards – BFIqA (Advocate); BFIqP (Practitioner) and BFIqL (Leader). The qualification started with a pilot of 15 midwives during 2020 and was launched after being deemed a success in 2021. Louise was selected from over 70 applicants for one of 15 places in the first cohort. The aim of the course is to equip leaders to further the public health agenda of breastfeeding.

The course of study ran from March to September this year with the results coming out in November. The graduation awards were given during the BFI's annual conference (virtually) by Professor Mary Renfrew.

Louise is the first midwifery Lecturer in the UK to have graduated with a distinction. She has commented that it was much harder work than she's expected over the precious summer months but is delighted with the achievement.



MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs update

The MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs is in the process of designing and developing a Bulletin of International Humanitarian Affairs to provide a primary platform for exceptional dissertation students in the MSc to publish. As there are very few journals and platforms in humanitarian affairs, this is an effort to provide the MSc students an opportunity.

The Bulletin is co-edited by Dr Janaka Jayawickrama and Ms Claudia Adler. Dr Jo Rose, Dr Jerome Wright, and Professor Karl Atkin are the Editorial Advisors for this Bulletin of International Humanitarian Affairs. Various academic and research institutions in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well as United Nation Agencies are already supportive of this initiative.

The first issue of the Bulletin is expected to be published in February 2022 with topics covering from COVID-19, humanitarian protection and assistance, humanitarian financing, and mental health in crises. This Bulletin expects to bridge a gap and provide an opportunity for students to publish and disseminate their work to the academic, research, policy, and practice communities in humanitarian affairs globally.

The MSc in International Humanitarian Affairs team are excited to see this project grow.

Turning the TIDE on antibiotic resistance to MRSA

Researchers at York Trials Unit (Department of Health Sciences, University of York) are undertaking a clinical trial, TIDE, to test alternative treatments for MRSA decolonisation. Working in partnership with South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, the team have been awarded £1.9m by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Technology Assessment (HTA) programme. The findings of this research have the potential to widen the recommended treatment options for nasal decolonisation of MRSA, therefore helping in the fight against antibiotic resistance.



MRSA (methicilin resistant staphylococcus aureus) is a bacteria that can live on our skin or in our nose without causing harm, this is called being colonised with MRSA. Some patients coming into hospital who are colonised with MRSA are at increased risk of developing MRSA infections. MRSA infections can develop if patients have health conditions or illnesses that make them more susceptible to infection or if the MRSA bacteria gain access to areas of the body, such as the site of surgery or when a drip is inserted to give fluid or drugs. MRSA infections are resistant to the penicillin group of antibiotics therefore are difficult to treat. To prevent infection whilst in hospital, many patients are routinely screened for MRSA colonisation on admission and if they test positive are “decolonised” of the MRSA bacteria. This usually involves the patient applying the nasal ointment, mupirocin (an antibiotic), three times daily for five days inside the nose and using a chlorhexidine (antiseptic) body wash. There is a need to move away from relying on a single treatment and, because of increases in antibiotic resistance, to identify alternatives to mupirocin for MRSA decolonisation.

The TIDE study is being co-led by Chief Investigators Professor Catherine Hewitt, Deputy Director of the York Trials Unit and Professor Mike Reed, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust. Around 3,000 patients, recruited from NHS hospitals across the country, will take part in the study, which aims to examine if polyhexanide gel (an antiseptic) and neomycin cream (a combined antiseptic and antibiotic) are effective alternatives mupirocin ointment (an antibiotic), the usual standard of care treatment for early nasal MRSA decolonisation. Patients will be randomly assigned to one of the three treatments, alongside a chlorhexidine body wash.

TIDE aims to assess the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the alternative treatments relative to mupirocin. The primary outcome is successful early decolonisation, defined as a negative nasal MRSA swab at 48 hrs post treatment. The secondary outcomes include, treatment acceptability for patients, length of hospital stay and successful decolonisation in patients with mupirocin resistant strains of MRSA. This trial also aims to include vulnerable and under-served populations such as people with dementia who are unable to give consent for themselves. It is really important to ensure they are included as they make up a large proportion of those at risk.

Researchers consulted with the trial’s Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) co-applicant, from MRSA Action UK, before submitting their successful bid for funding. Their continued involvement as advisor for the project, will help the project team to get a wider public perspective through members of MRSA Action UK. A project specific PPI panel will also contribute their perspective throughout the study, expected to be completed in November 2024.

The importance of the research was mentioned in a recent press release, which can be seen here: <https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/news/trust/north-of-england-research-collaboration-to-deliver-1-9-million-study-investigating-mrsa-decolonisation/>

Researchers to undertake school-based cluster randomised controlled trial (E-PLAYS-2) aimed at enhancing language skills for young children with social communication difficulties

Researchers at York Trials Unit in collaboration with the University of Bedfordshire, the Open University and Essex University have been awarded a £1.4m grant by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), to help children with social communication difficulties. The Chief Investigator is Dr Suzanne Murphy, Principal Research Fellow at the University of Bedfordshire and Associate Director of the NIHR Research Design Service (East of England).

The 4-year E-PLAYS-2 trial will recruit over 1000 children aged between 5-7 years old from 84 primary schools across Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and North London. The trial will evaluate the effectiveness of a fun, interactive computer game (known as E-PLAYS) played by pairs of children in school. E-PLAYS aims to develop children's perspective taking skills and language abilities by developing their confidence during social interaction.

Many children experience difficulties with social communication, and struggle with conversational tasks such as appropriate use of greetings, turn-taking during a conversation, understanding of non-literal language (e.g. jokes), and social conventions (e.g. understand other's perspectives). These difficulties have profound effects on children's social development, mental health, and education and are strongly associated with bullying, isolation and exclusion during school years. Such difficulties during childhood also affect how a person participates in society when they are older.

There is a noted lack of interventions for children with social communication difficulties and the limited take up of technology in this field is widely regarded as a missed opportunity. The E-PLAYS-2 trial is particularly timely, given the negative impact the pandemic has had on children's language and communication skills.

E-PLAYS-2 builds on a previous pilot study conducted by the Chief Investigator which showed efficacy with regard to language improvement, and an RfPB feasibility study conducted in collaboration with York Trials Unit and others, which showed suitable recruitment and response rates. This trial will assess if usual care plus E-PLAYS is effective in improving children's pragmatic language skills, in comparison to usual care on its own. Observations, interviews, focus groups and surveys will also be completed with schools to understand the delivery and acceptability of the intervention.

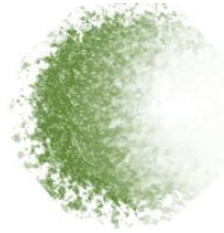
Researchers at York Trials Units have worked with the Chief Investigator and co-applicants from an early stage in order to design E-PLAYS-2 and propose the required analyses. The research team consulted parents of children with language disorders, SLNC school staff, and children's communication charity 'I CANS' before submitting the successful bid for funding and they will continue to be consulted throughout the study.

The findings of the research will be a significant contribution to the field's sparse evidence base and if effective E-PLAYS will provide schools with a free intervention to support children with social communication difficulties.

The impact and importance of the research was mentioned in a recent press release, which can be seen here: <https://www.beds.ac.uk/news/2021/november/1-4m-study-to-improve-childrens-language-communication-skills/>

BASIL Study Update – initial pilot results published

The BASIL (Behavioural Activation for Social IsoLation) programme of research was set up in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The programme aims to evaluate a brief psychological intervention to mitigate depression and loneliness for older people with long-term health conditions. It is one of the first studies to address the mental health impact of the pandemic and is the largest study investigating both depression and loneliness.



BASIL
Behavioural Activation
in Social Isolation

Study participants are randomly allocated to one of two groups - the BASIL intervention (a brief psychological intervention) or usual care (with signposting information about maintaining physical and mental wellbeing).

The BASIL intervention consists of a support package based on Behavioural Activation (BA). BA is a type of support that aims to help people maintain or introduce activities which are important to them. During up to 8 sessions, Participants are led through a self-help booklet (the 'BASIL booklet') which guides them through the intervention in manageable steps. The intervention is delivered over the telephone by a range of health and social care professionals ('BASIL support workers').

In April 2020 the pilot trial (BASIL C-19) commenced, and we are happy to report that the study successfully recruited 96 participants within 18 weeks, with follow up rates of 94% at 1 month and 90% at 3 months. Qualitative work was also undertaken with 16 intervention participants and 9 BASIL support workers taking part in semi-structured interviews to discuss their views and experiences of the study and BASIL intervention.

We have now published our main findings from the pilot study in PLOS Medicine. These findings suggest that both recruiting participants remotely and delivering the intervention over the telephone was feasible. The qualitative interviews show that the BA intervention was acceptable to both participants and support workers, and that the BASIL booklet was both engaging and understandable. Although this pilot study is not powered to detect significant differences between groups, the initial results also suggest that loneliness was reduced for participants receiving the BA intervention. This is very encouraging for our definitive main trial (BASIL+), which is being delivered remotely and is well underway at 11 sites across England and Wales, and due to finish recruitment at the end of January 2022.

The study was led by Professor Simon Gilbody, Director of the Mental Health & Addictions Research Group (MHARG), and Professor David Ekers, Clinical Director for research and development at TEWV NHS Foundation Trust and Honorary Professor at the University of York.

Keep up to date with BASIL research on:

Twitter: @BASIL_Research

Website: <https://sites.google.com/nih.ac.uk/basil>

BASIL C-19 Pilot Paper available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003779>

Staff News

Hello

We wish a very warm welcome to new members of staff who have joined the department recently, these include: Anne Marie McIntyre, Elaine Whitton, Ben Lorimer, Hannah Connolly, Jane Blackwell, Sagarmoy Phukan, Sarah Compton and Sophie Godfrey.

Goodbye

We also wish a very fond farewell to those who have left, including: Alexander Jarde, Louise Armstrong, Paul Collings, Mehreen Faisal.

Congratulations

Maddy Power on the birth of her baby girl Astrid, born on 20th October.

Health Sciences post-doctoral researcher Grace Gardner was a finalist in the prestigious 'Speak up for Food Security' research storytelling competition in October.

Grace was one of five finalists in the annual UK Research and Innovation-funded (UKRI) competition. She said: "The storytelling competition was a great experience. The final was a lot of fun, with the audience voting for the winner. All of the finalists were really strong and I was delighted to make the final five."

The competition winner was Phillippa Simmonds, a PhD researcher from the University of Gloucestershire. Her research is focused on livestock sector discourses around cows, sheep, and climate change.

See Grace's talk here <https://youtu.be/7mdga-baFxm>

Merry Christmas!

Thank you to everyone who has provided articles and pictures to Megaphone over the last year. I really hope you have enjoyed reading the issues and I look forward to your contributions next year.

Merry Christmas and all the best for 2022.

Jane

If you would like to make a submission to future editions of Megaphone, please contact Jane Milsom (jane.milsom@york.ac.uk or tel 01904 321392).