

Internship case study

Background

I am an Extended Scope Physiotherapy Practitioner working in a community orthopaedics service within the Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust.

I completed a Master's degree in advanced neuro-musculoskeletal physiotherapy in 2013 and it has been my ambition to incorporate an element of research into my clinical career pathway ever since. I subsequently contacted the trust's lead research nurse, Lee Tomlinson, who informed me about the internship.



About the project

My clinical area of interest is steroid injections for musculoskeletal disorders of the shoulder. This is a very commonly used treatment modality for numerous shoulder disorders and recently physiotherapists have extended their scope to incorporate musculoskeletal steroid injections into their practice. Despite steroid injections being frequently used there is still a lot of uncertainty surrounding their use. I hope to study this modality further to help optimise its usage and I also want to identify other treatment methods which could possibly be used as alternatives to steroid injections.

My aims for the internship were to refine my project idea and to identify potential supervisors in order to apply for a HEE/NIHR ICA Clinical Doctoral Research Fellowship.

About my internship

Following my internship application interview it was suggested that I complete three research specific modules provided by the University of Brighton with a specific focus on the areas that my knowledge was deemed to be lacking in. I was also assigned a mentor, Dr Nina Dunne, a senior lecturer at the School of Health Sciences, who I met with regularly and who gave me guidance throughout the internship. Nina is an experienced researcher who completed a PhD at the University of Manchester and has also completed further training in statistics. With her guidance I was able to set out goals for my internship and refine my thought processes surrounding my project idea. She also gave me the confidence to approach experts in the field I wished to study.

My trust agreed to allow me time away from my clinic to attend the free standing modules delivered by the University of Brighton. They also agreed to dates and times that I could use to meet up with my mentor and potential supervisors for my proposed project. The internship started in November 2014 and I was able to take 160 hours of backfilled clinical time in order to complete the three modules, meet up with Nina and meet up with potential supervisors.

The three modules I enrolled for through the internship have given me the opportunity to obtain 60 additional M-level credits in the research related subjects of ethics, statistics and taking research forward in health and social care. I have also attended a study day at the University of Brighton which allowed me to hear other people's experiences of successfully applying for a HEE/NIHR ICA Clinical Doctoral Research Fellowship and which proved to be an excellent networking opportunity.

Outputs

In the early stages of the internship my mentor asked me to produce a 5000 word literature review which she critically appraised and fed back to me on. This focussed on an element of my research idea and gave me a firm foundation to base the rest of my internship on. I also developed decision trees and graphs which I subsequently presented to a potential supervisor.

I gave a presentation to the trust's research and development group on my experiences of the internship and my proposed study subject. This group consisted of approximately 10 people with varying degrees of research experience and a member of the public. Not only did this presentation give me some practice in presenting to a group but the feedback from the member of public reiterated to me the importance of public involvement in health research. I have subsequently set up a patient and public involvement (PPI) group in my area and am due to have a meeting in the near future to hear their views. I am certain that this will be extremely useful to further refine my research idea.

The three modules at the University of Brighton required me to complete assignments in order to qualify for the M-level credits. These assignments gave me practical experience in areas that my research knowledge was lacking and made me analyse aspects of research that I had not considered in the past.

The internship has also given me confidence to get work published and I have subsequently submitted a book review to a peer-review pain journal. I am also in discussion with my MSc research supervisor to get my masters research project published.

Benefits

This internship has given me the confidence to bridge the gap between completing a masters and pursuing funding for a PhD. It has given me the opportunity to include elements of research into my current job and it has allowed me to network with, and get support from, experienced researchers. Having the support of an experienced mentor gave me the confidence to approach world class experts in the subject I wish to study. The importance and benefits of involving patients and public at a very early stage in the process has been highlighted on numerous occasions throughout my internship. I have been introduced to a variety of extremely knowledgeable people who I feel can help me achieve my goals and I hope that in the future I can offer the same help to others within my trust.

I am in the process of submitting my application form for the next HEE/NIHR ICA Clinical Doctoral Research Fellowship which I will submit in mid-2016.

Dr Nina Dunne, Senior lecturer at the School of Health Sciences and Llewellyn's mentor said:

“Llewellyn's progress has been very good. His application for an HEE/NIHR funded PhD fellowship is still ongoing but I have high hopes that it will be a robust submission. I have seen a sample of Llewellyn's work, namely a literature review and he has demonstrated a good writing style and good critical analysis of the literature available. He has had to read extensively and within a few months he read a large number of papers and wrote a detailed literature review. Llewellyn has kept all meetings arranged and has ensured that these meetings occurred monthly.

He has sought the advice of experts in the field in order to ensure that his research question is robust. He has gained in confidence and has learnt new research methodologies that will support both his application and his research career.

I have no hesitation to recommend Llewellyn to apply for the HEE/NIHR funded PhD fellowships.”