

Internship case study

Katy Jack

Background

I have worked as a specialist nurse in viral hepatitis since 1999, who is currently working at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. My role involves looking after patients with hepatitis B and C infection which includes monitoring their liver function and delivering antiviral treatments when necessary. Many patients are infected with hepatitis C as a consequence of sharing drug injecting paraphernalia and as this is illegal, many will have to serve a prison sentence for drug related crimes.



About the project

The prison population represents a group of people with high risk factors for being exposed to HCV and to a lesser extent hepatitis B and HIV. An opportunity is thus presented to undertake testing, vaccination and treatment of HBV and HCV in a cohort that may not otherwise have access to such services. However the prevalence of HCV, HBV and HIV in prisons is not well established due to the low levels of testing that occur. A clear understanding of the size of the infected prison population will inform the development of antiviral treatment services.

About my internship

My Bronze Scholar * project was twofold; firstly to review the literature underpinning the NICE Public Health Guidance published in 2012 on promoting the awareness and testing of HBV and HCV which included recommendations for the prison service, and secondly to audit the performance of HMP Nottingham against the criteria specified in the guidance.

* the Bronze Scholar internship scheme is the local internship scheme within the ICA Programme in the East Midlands

Mentor Support

My mentor is a clinical academic; a consultant in viral hepatitis and the Trust's Director of Research and Innovation. We met at the start of the programme to discuss the exact focus of my work and clarify what would be possible to achieve in the allotted time-frame. We subsequently met every few weeks and communicated via email to discuss the project as it unfolded.

Timings

I work part-time (three days a week) and was permitted to take my 48 study days as one block during December 2012 to March 2013 meaning I had 16 weeks in which to focus exclusively on my project.

Development

This was the first opportunity I have had to undertake a substantial review of literature that underpins national recommendations for clinical practice. Having to clearly identify the search terms and select literature for inclusion initially felt daunting as I was very keen to 'get it right' but as the process emerged it became apparent what should and should not be included. Furthermore, the project gave me a valuable opportunity to understand the process of conducting any form of research activity in a custodial environment where the security requirements transcend all other processes. The Bronze Scholarship also included study days which covered topics such as research design, different methods and tips on applying for a Masters in research degree.

Output

On the final study day of the scholarship, we all verbally presented our work. I also had a poster of the audit findings accepted at the International Network on Hepatitis in Substance Users conference held in Munich in September 2013.

Benefits

The audit I undertook as part of the Bronze Scholarship enabled me to develop a research protocol which formed the basis of my application to undertake a NIHR funded Masters in Research Methods (MARM), for which I was successful. After completion of the MARM at Nottingham University I went on to undertake the Silver Scholar award based at Lincoln University. This combined academic experience has culminated in being awarded a CLAHRC PhD studentship which commences in October 2015. My doctoral study will be to evaluate the impact that the introduction of opt-out testing using dried blood spots has on the uptake of HCV testing and treatment in East Midlands prisons.