

Internship case study

Kirsty Robinson

Background

I work as an Older People's Dietitian for Barts Health NHS Trust. This was a new dietetic position established in 2015; developed to meet the growing need for quality nutritional care for older people in the acute hospital setting.

About the project

I have recently completed my funded HEE / NIHR Internship at Kingston and St George's, University of London. I would describe the whole experience as inspirational first step towards a clinical academic career.

About my internship

I was awarded a fully-funded studentship to complete two Masters level modules (Research Methods and Improvement and Implementation science) and a 26 day Clinical Research placement. This was offered to NHS healthcare professionals as part of the drive to modernise NHS careers and improve healthcare, facilitating excellence in practice through innovative research. The inter-professional programme funded by HEE is part of an Integrated Clinical Academic Career Training programme that equips healthcare professionals with in-depth knowledge of research and key skills, enabling them to generate, support and lead research within the clinical setting.

Why did I apply for this award?

I was aware of this unique and valuable opportunity, so much so I moved from Scotland to London to enable myself to apply. Since graduating I'd always been curious as to why things are done the way they are, how they benefit patients and whether changes in practice would be beneficial. This led me to want to learn more about healthcare research and develop my skills to improve my practice, help others development and work with others to improve patient care.



Opportunities

The opportunities the internship has brought to me are:

1. I have gained a deeper understanding and basic / “beginner” application of how good quality quantitative and qualitative patient focused research is carried out.
2. I have developed a critical “in depth” and broader understanding of current evidence base related to nutrition and older people.
3. I have also developed a critical evidence based approach to implementing changes in healthcare.
4. I have a clearer vision and understanding of the benefits and practicalities of working in partnership with the public to design services and research.
5. I have built an insight into the research network within my employing organisation and NHS England’s priorities.

How did the award benefit my clinical practice?

One month after finishing the course I feel that the course has helped me within my clinical role already. For the time being I intend to put into practice what I have learnt to help develop this new job role within a service improvement capacity. My particular research interests relate to decision making and clinically assisted nutrition for older people within the acute hospital setting and sarcopenia. These are areas which are beginning to be more widely researched however there are currently many unknown questions.

The internship has been a high quality, supportive, useful learning opportunity. I hope to go on to complete the Master of Clinical Research programme in the future, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in gaining some insight into developing a clinical academic career.

Dr Cheryl Whiting, Associate Professor and programme lead for the HEE/NIHR internship at Kingston and St George’s University of London, notes that the internship provides a great opportunity to learn about research theory and plan a clinically relevant research study of particular personal interest.

Students like Kirsty have the opportunity to actively engage with subject experts and researchers in order to gain a realistic insight into what can clinically and personally be achieved through research.

Dr Whiting says it’s “always encouraging to see personal success and the achievement of ambition. I hope that Kirsty’s desire to make a difference through personal development inspires others to take forward the research agenda”.