CHSS Ugandan research goes global

CHSS Research Fellow Rowena Merritt experienced a flurry of media activity following publication of a Guardian article about her exploratory study of coercive breastfeeding among some Ugandan fathers. The men demand breastmilk from their lactating partner, often before the baby is fed.

It was ‘most shared’ Guardian Online story on 28 January, reaching Europe, New Zealand and most of Africa.

Two days later Rowena joined BBC Radio 4 Woman’s Hour host Jeni Murray and others to discuss this emotive topic. She also appeared on The Moncrieff Show, Ireland’s top radio talk slot.

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News and events round up

Hospice at Home – what works best?

In January, the OPEL project team, led by Consultant and CHSS Professor of Palliative Medicine Claire Butler held successful Consensus Events in Leeds and London. The aim was to share study findings to date and receive feedback and input from service providers, commissioners and public.

The events represent the third phase of this important project; sharing study findings to date and gaining input and feedback on them.

Funded by the NIHR Health Services and Delivery Research Programme, the OPEL (Optimum Hospice at Home Services for End of Life Care) study aims to discover what works best, for whom and under what circumstances, when receiving hospice at home services.

The all-day sessions were designed to elicit thoughts from a mixed audience of Hospice and public sector providers, service commissioners and members of the public.

The team wanted to find out:
- whether early findings resonate with their own H@H experiences
- if there was anything to be addressed which has not been looked at or is missing
- what information would be most useful to them in the end of project report
- what ideas do they have for sharing the project findings for maximum coverage and impact?

Around 100 people attended the two events. Claire Butler presented the preliminary phase 2 findings (12 case study sites and 341 patient/carer informal pairings). Melanie Rees Roberts outlined phase one results (survey of 70 H@H services) and Professor Tricia Wilson gave an overview of the research methods used.

Afterwards, the audience attended a choice of workshops themed around support for carers, the role of H@H volunteers, sustainability of services and integration and coordination.

The audience were enthusiastic about the events and their participation.

‘Thank you for investing in this important issue’
Public attendee, Leeds event 16/1/20.

‘The presentations and workshop were so interesting with a great balance of giving and receiving information’
Hospice provider, London event 23/1/20.

Read more about the OPEL project on our website: www.kent.ac.uk/chss/research/docs/current/2016_11_21_HAH.html
Darzi Fellows’ work recognised

In 2018 CHSS welcomed our visiting Darzi Fellows; clinicians undertaking innovative projects while studying for a Darzi Fellowship in Clinical Leadership at London Southbank University. (see CHSS newsletter 32 for more information).

NHS Registrar Dr James Hadlow’s work, mentored by CHSS Clinical Professor Chris Farmer, focused on the ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital health technology. Whilst AI offers huge opportunities to clinicians and patients, balanced regulation to ensure patient and public safety while also allowing innovation to flourish should be a priority. 'Ethical product development' embedding the citizen voice in the innovation process is vital to ensure that patient and public voices are heard, particularly those from groups traditionally left behind such as those living with Dementia.

James’ innovative ‘World Café’ event entitled ‘Tea, Technology and Me’, invited people and carers living with dementia to talk about and explore these issues. He recently presented evidence gathered to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence (APPG AI), as part of its Citizen Participation Task Force.

PhD Study – do you swim outdoors?

We are asking adults who swim outdoors in the UK to complete a short survey. The findings will help to develop guidance to improve safety. Participants are entered in a prize draw to win a £100 Wiggle voucher.

Complete the survey here.

Please contact Sarah Spencer for more details. (01227 827914) s.spencer@kent.ac.uk

For her Darzi project, Health Visitor Philippa Burden co-produced a video documenting breastfeeding experiences of Slovakian Roma mothers in Kent. She worked with Darzi mentor Professor Sally Kendall. Philippa’s lovely short film, reflecting women's very personal views, thoughts and experiences is a useful breastfeeding support resource. Philippa’s work was included in the recently published Health Visitors’ Good Practice Case studies (see p7).

You can watch the video on our CHSS YouTube channel here.

NIHR | Applied Research Collaborations Kent, Surrey and Sussex

ARC KSS updates

Read about all the great work going on across our region’s new NIHR Applied Research Collaboration in the ARC KSS newsletter. There are also dedicated pages for ARC KSS on the Sussex Partnership Trust website.
Prestigious NIHR Senior Investigator Award for Stephen

Professor of Health Policy Stephen Peckham, Director of CHSS has been appointed NIHR Senior Investigator (SI). The award is one of 28 given to outstanding national research leaders in the NIHR 2020 SI appointments.

Stephen, who is also Founding Director of the new NIHR Applied Research Collaboration, Kent Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) said ‘This represents only the second ever Senior Investigator award given in our region, so I’m really delighted to be recognised in this way’.

Senior Investigators are among the most prominent and prestigious researchers funded by the NIHR and the most outstanding leaders of patient and people-based research within the NIHR research community. Collectively, they constitute the NIHR College of Senior Investigators, and are members of the NIHR Academy.

The first south east recipient moved away, leaving Stephen as the sole NIHR Senior Investigator based in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

NIHR Senior Investigators:
• Contribute significantly to NIHR as a senior leader
• Lead in NIHR people training and development
• Act as ambassadors for the NIHR
• Demonstrate research excellence
• Integrate patient and public involvement in research
• Play a leading role in NIHR’s contribution to growth

Find out more on the NIHR website www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/academy-programmes/senior-investigators.htm

New projects

Increasing HPV Vaccination coverage in Africa

Research Associate Rebecca Cassidy is part of a multidisciplinary collaboration working to develop further research around cancer prevention and vaccination against Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

The University of Kent Global Challenges Research Fund and Global Challenges Doctoral School (GCDC) have funded this partnership. Unititing biosciences and social sciences researchers from Kent, it links with academics in Kenya and international NGOs working on cancer screening and prevention across Africa.

The significant and growing problem of cancer in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) is a priority area for research. Human Papilloma Viruses (HPV) cause around 5% of cancers worldwide including most cervical cancer. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) over 20% of cancers are caused by HPV. Lack of access to screening and vaccination results in high morbidity and mortality levels.

Impacts on economic development and community welfare are considerable, falling disproportionately on women facing a dual burden of cervical cancer and caring responsibilities.

Universal HPV vaccination has been implemented successfully in a very few SSA countries as an effective intervention. Important lessons have been learned from pilots, but many barriers to successful rollout and take-up remain.

This project will increase our knowledge of vaccine hesitancy and acceptance, focusing on HPV in African contexts. Dr Olamide Todowede (GCDC PDRA) will work in the field in Kenya. Her focus will be on communication and outreach strategies to widen access to and increase uptake of HPV vaccinations.

Later in the year, there will be a parallel study to gain insight into how Mozambique is preparing to initiate its roll-out of the vaccination programme there.
Evaluating ‘Fantastic Fred’

CHSS Senior Clinical Research Fellow Lindsay Forbes and Research Associate Sarah Spencer recently evaluated the early months of delivering the Fantastic Fred Experience to schools, on behalf of seven Kent CCGs.

Fantastic Fred uses an interactive performance format to encourage good mental health-promoting behaviours around Food, Rest, Exercise and Digital Devices (‘FRED’).

The intervention was developed as part of the ‘Good Mental Health Matters’ programme for all young people across Kent (excluding Medway), by communications company the Drummer Agency in collaboration with clinical and commissioner mental health leads and therapists. It was delivered free to all primary schools and the scout movement over summer term 2019.

The evaluation explored:

- Reach of the FFE
- Teacher and parent perspectives on content and delivery
- Whether children recalled FFE messages.

Lindsay found evidence that FFE was very well received and acceptable to children, school staff and parents. Whilst it is significant that children had good recall of key messages several months after receiving FFE, there was no evidence at this early stage of any behaviour change.

The evaluation made several recommendations, including further monitoring of reach in relation to socioeconomic deprivation, and seeking funding to examine the effect on behaviour and ultimately, mental health.

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Coercive breastfeeding by Ugandan fathers

Last Summer CHSS Newsletter reported on Dr Rowena Merritt’s visit with Dr Sarah Hotham to Kyambogo University, Kampala in a preliminary study of fathers drinking breastmilk. Last month’s Guardian article (see foot of page) provoked a debate in the media. Below Rowena discusses the background to this work and her motivation and reaction to what they saw and heard.

“drinking the breast milk helped them relax… the behaviour was ‘addictive’…”

I first heard about men taking breastmilk away from their babies at a workshop in Kenya.

What surprised and disappointed me in equal measures, was that this behaviour had been discussed publicly in 2018, but no one appeared to be doing anything about it.

From that moment, I was determined to conduct research into the behaviour, and most importantly, generate support and funds to try and tackle it.

During our trip to Uganda, we spoke to the Minister of Health, who stressed that this is a new and unacceptable behaviour.

We were shocked at how willing men were to tell us about an underground, secretive behaviour. I was struck by the strength of their words. They said drinking breast milk helped them ‘relax’, that the behaviour was ‘addictive’ and they were ‘obsessed’ with drinking it, as if it were a drug of choice.

Healthcare professionals’ reaction shocked me the most. At first, they would deny absolutely that such behaviour existed in Uganda. When reminded that their Minister of Health had raised it in parliament, they laughed nervously and withdrew eye contact. They then all talked about seeing mothers with malnourished and poorly babies, or ripped and infected nipples from this practice.

Our research found that women are not asked if they want to feed their partners; the man just initiates it and takes silence as consent. Should a mother dare to question it, manipulative words may be used: “This is how I show you love and how you show me love”. No concern is shown for the mother or baby’s wellbeing; men simply feel they have the right.

Were fathers worried that the mother might become very tired or the baby might not get the milk they deserve? One responded: “If you feed a cow well, they produce much milk. I feed my wife well”.

If this issue remains something people simply deny or laugh nervously about, it will never be taken seriously. Even more worrying, the longer it continues, the more likely it is to become part of the culture and traditions of Uganda. Then it will be far more difficult to stop.

We need funding for more research to understand the prevalence of this behaviour, and then we need action – and fast.”

Media links:

The Guardian, 28/1

Woman’s Hour 30/1/20: broadcast – 09:24
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000dqyd (you need to create/sign in to your BBC account).
CHSS people

Dr Catherine Marchand, Research Associate

Catherine moved to the UK from Canada, joining CHSS in 2015. She is Co-Director of the CHSS/Kent Business School MSc Healthcare Management @Medway. Major projects in CHSS include NIHR funded RISKIT-CJS (Senior Trial Manager) and NIHR HS & DR GP Teams (co-applicant and researcher).

Tell us about your early days
I was born in Montreal, Quebec. Mum worked in public sector administration. My Dad is a sales rep and we moved around the city a few times. I was very sporty. I loved running and also modern jazz dance which I did till I was 18. I was quite academic, loving science topics, though anxiety hindered my exam performance. I became much better when I got to college. My first job was at Walmart, an organisation I try to avoid nowadays!

How was University?
I studied Human Resource Management at the Business School of The Université du Québec à Montréal. I soon decided I didn’t want to become somebody who fires people; and moved into Organisational Behaviour studying workplace interaction using sociology and psychology theories. I worked in a maple syrup shop in Montreal during holidays, and during terms was a research assistant to pay for Uni and housing.

In 2006 I gained my BCom in management and my MBA-research in 2009. My Master’s dissertation explored the role teams play in the workplace dynamics, teamwork and team climate, across different professions and organisational settings. I was privileged to mentor and supervise Masters Students. My doctoral thesis was around the effect of organisational support on stress. I completed my PhD in Management in 2015. I had planned to do the Doctorate in the United States, but ended up staying in Canada.

Why was that?
Several reasons, but mainly that I became ill in 2009 and was diagnosed in January 2010 with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, a serious autoimmune and chronic disease. It had a huge impact on my life. I went on sick leave for 9 months and moved back with my parents. I was hospitalised several times, once with life-threatening sepsis. By 2012 things were more stable and I was more in control with the disease. A Professor signposted me to the Faculty of Medicine, Université de Montréal, where I occupied various roles as part of the Patients-as-Partners initiative – patient adviser, teacher and researcher. It helped make sense of everything; I was a patient, I was a researcher and I was still me, Catherine.

What prompted you to leave Canada?
I think it was taking back control of my identity and my life. My partner had moved to the UK in 2014. I began applying for jobs. After a Skype interview I joined CHSS in September 2015. The Centre is a very friendly place and I was appointed Senior Trial Manager for RISKIT-CJS working with Professor Simon Coulton amongst other projects relating to primary healthcare workforce.

How do the UK and Canada compare for healthcare systems?
Quebec has a national service similar to here where core services are publicly funded. The main difference is the use of third sector provision in the UK. This is very different in Canada where the charity sector is much smaller and in the UK it is more research-oriented.

What are your research ambitions?
My ultimate goal is to help improve patient care and nurture the health workforce. It is the only way the system can survive. My personal experience has a lot to do with it. I strongly believe that as researchers we have responsibility to bring humanity to the research process. RISKIT-CJS is a good example of it. When we talk about the participants we talk about young people in school or Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), – not research subjects. I’m glad to be part of a project of this size, which is the first of its kind (ie population) to receive NIHR funding.

What are your hobbies?
I enjoy music and dancing and I love music festivals. I am a keen traveller and enjoy backpacking. When it comes to overseas, I have always dreamed of going to Vietnam but my favourite place to date is Turkey. I have seen quite a lot of the UK. I loved Wales and Glasgow in particular. I also enjoy knitting and have produced several tiny hats for babies.

What do you miss about your home country?
Whilst Canterbury is a beautiful city, it took two years to realise what a cultural oasis it is for music and art. Apart from family, one thing I miss is the climate of trade union activism in Quebec. Also some of the food; poutine is a dish made from chips and cheese curds with gravy (the Canadian equivalent of a kebab at 2am!) But I have been here for several years now and my (first language) French is starting to suffer, so I must be getting quite settled in the UK!

For more about Catherine and her research visit the CHSS staff webpages: www.kent.ac.uk/chss/staff
Featured CHSS publications

Health Visiting in England: A Vision for the Future

Health visiting – Good practice case studies

Darzi Fellow Philippa Burden (see p3) co-produced a film about breastfeeding with Slovakian Roma mothers. This project has now been published as a case study by the Institute of Health Visiting.

The overall aims of making the film were to:

• Find out more about infant feeding beliefs and improve breastfeeding initiation amongst Eastern European Roma mothers
• Work in a co-productive way, ensuring the mothers also took ownership of the project and had some future investment in its success.

Collaborative working was central to the success of this project. Philippa worked with the mothers, with advice and support from local community development workers, Professor Sally Kendall and the academic team at CHSS, London South Bank University and the film maker.

Read the full case study online:

Selected recent CHSS publications


Hamilton-West K E, Mitne A & Hotham S. New horizons in supporting older people’s health and wellbeing: is social prescribing a way forward? Age and Ageing, afaa016

Details of all CHSS research is available on our website: www.kent.ac.uk/chss/research/current.html
CHSS staff news

Information about all CHSS staff is available on our website: www.kent.ac.uk/chss/staff
Details of our current vacancies and studentships: www.kent.ac.uk/chss/vacancies.html

Welcome to:

Rachel Borthwick
Research Facilitator

Rachel has a background as a midwife but has wide research experience. She joined in February and will work on a variety of projects.

Ola Tododewe
Research Associate

Ola joins CHSS for six months working on a Global Challenges Research Funded project. She will be spending some of her time on fieldwork in Kenya.

Sara Thomas
NIHR/HEE PCAF student

Practising Health Visitor
Sara joins CHSS as Honorary Researcher. Based at Kent Community Health Trust she is undertaking a Health Education England/NIHR ICA Pre-Doctoral Clinical Academic Fellowship.

Tamiris Resende
Visiting PhD Student

Tamiris will be with CHSS for six months until the Summer. She is a PhD Student at Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) and Federal University of Viçosa (UFV).

About CHSS

CHSS is a centre of research excellence which undertakes high quality research into a wide range of health systems and health services issues at local, national and international levels. CHSS also supports and advises health care staff to develop and undertake research projects. CHSS collaborates with a wide range of partners in Kent, the UK and in other countries to improve the links between research, policy and practice.

Please see the CHSS website for details of current and previous research and publications.

Details of current CHSS vacancies and studentships can be found at:
www.kent.ac.uk/chss/vacancies.html

NIHR Research Design Service South East

Need help applying for health or social care research funding?
RDS SE – FREE advice and support on all aspects of research design

Since 2008 CHSS has hosted the RDS SE at the University of Kent. The service also operates from the Universities of Brighton and Surrey.

www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk

Fundraiser for Pilgrims Hospice

CHSS Research Associate Dr Simon Bailey is joining his sisters in raising money for Pilgrims Hospice in recognition of the first-class care his late Father received.

Read about their Year of Fundraising on the Just Giving page:
www.justgiving.com/fundraising/clare-thomas39