

TITLE: Navigating a New World: My JPUH Research and Evaluation Scholarship Journey

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Since being seconded to the Integrated Care Board as an Evidence and Evaluation advisor, from the James Paget University Hospital where I worked as a Physician Associate, it felt like I had stepped into a whole new world. The healthcare "system" we work in became just as important as the specific roles we played within it. My previous focus had been on patient management, the daily stresses of ward work, and the evolving landscape of being a Physician Associate for 5 years. However, there had been limited development or national definition of the role, leaving me in a state of flux.

Even though this scholarship is led by James Paget University Hospital, knowing there were going to be people from across the system working and learning about project design, QI and evaluation together has helped understand the wide scope of roles and innovations across the system. I found myself in quite a unique position within the scholarship, already having research, audit, and QI experience previously, but I was new to formal service evaluation.

As the project was chosen for me as part of the new role, I was initially envious of the passion others had for the projects that are so entwined with the job they are performing. I knew that in my previous role as a Physician Associate, I would have had the same passion about the problem I wanted to solve!

The project I have been working on for the scholarship is the inHIP Community Voices (CV) Bowel Cancer Screening Pilot. This initiative focuses on understanding health inequalities, by training 'Trusted Communicators' from voluntary, community or social enterprise (VCSE) organisations who interact with our region's communities, especially those within the 'CORE20plus5' communities. The aim is to gain understanding and to give information to groups who experience health inequalities about specific topics, with bowel cancer screening being the focus of this pilot. I was tasked to design and perform focus groups with these trusted communicators, alongside those providing strategic direction and project design of this community voices pilot. This evaluation will feed into a national 'inHIP' health inequalities evaluation performed by NHS England.

Initially, the focus groups seemed like a very accessible project. However, it became clear that despite the well organised service, there had been no real discussion about aims, objectives and roles and responsibilities with respect to the evaluation. Entangling what exactly was wanted from an evaluation of the service only became clearer once national guidance from NHSE came to the team, but this was much later in the delivery of the pilot.

The mentorship has personally been the most beneficial. The last time I met my mentor was as my role as the associate PI of the RECOVERY trial and was we were in full COVID isolation gear. Sadly, I could not have picked them (or most other people) out of a line-up, and

understandably that time on the COVID ward is quite hard to look back on. Having time to talk 1-1 with someone who has navigated the research landscape in a supportive way has significantly boosted my confidence. Deconstructing my previous role, adjusting to the changes within my secondment role, and trying to consider my onward trajectory would have been much harder to do without by someone helping me appreciate the positives this transition and the new opportunities it offers.

I would encourage anyone who is passionate about improving the service they work for to fully engage in all the support offered by this scholarship. It is a journey of growth, learning, and transformation; the ideas you have could develop into something that has meaningful impact on health of communities within our system and may also help you appreciate the complex healthcare system we work for.



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I am currently seconded to the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board Evidence and Evaluation Hub as a Research and Evaluation Advisor. In my previous role, I was a Physician Associate in acute medicine at the James Paget University Hospital. Highlights of this role included being awarded 'employee of the year' during the pandemic for my work on covid patient management and research. Prior to this, I was a senior research associate within the lab of Professor Tom Wileman at the UEA, exploring the cell biology process 'Autophagy'.
