

# WOLFSON INSTITUTE OF POPULATION HEALTH NEWSLETTER ISSUE 84: 16 September 2025

In this issue of our Wolfson Institute of Population Health Newsletter, we celebrate the achievements and work of staff and students in the first half of September.

## FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues

During these last days of summer, I'm pleased to share the latest news and fascinating range of outputs from the Institute. Communicating about our research is very important, so do have a look at an interesting upcoming event at Queen Mary's Dept W on Wednesday 24 Sep 2pm-3pm, to meet Ed Day and his team from the Science Media Centre, an independent press office promoting academic/ scientific expertise. They're here to tell us about what they do and talk to our academics who would like to contribute to their work in future. Sign up [here](#).

For those of you who haven't heard the good news yet, I am delighted to share the recent news of promotions for nine Institute colleagues:

### Senior Lecturers

Dr Nina Fudge, Senior Lecturer in Social Science and Health

Mrs Kawther Hashem, Senior Lecturer in Public Health Nutrition

Dr Moneeza Kalhan Siddiqui, Senior Lecturer in Genetic Epidemiology



### Readers

Dr Adam Brentnall, Reader in Biostatistics

Mr Jonathan Goncalves Filippon, Reader in Health Systems

Dr Hannah Jones, Reader in Forensic Psychology & Mental Health

Miss Alison Thomson, Reader in Design



### Professors

Dr Georgia Bell Black, Professor of Applied Health Research

Dr Victoria Tzortziou Brown, Professor in Primary Healthcare and Health Policy

Huge congratulations to you all, from all our WIPH colleagues, staff and students.

With best wishes

Fiona



## MEET WIPH

### **MEET- Corey Jones (CanDetect Programme Manager, CCSPED)**

#### **How would you describe your roles and responsibilities?**

I am the programme manager for the CanDetect, a study aiming to accelerate detection of upper gastro-intestinal cancers in primary care, and I oversee a suite of research projects in the Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis. My work includes ensuring effective grant management, planning, budgeting, ethics compliance, stakeholder communication, and coordination of patient/public involvement. I also provide project management support for the CanTest International School for Cancer Detection Research in Primary Care.

#### **What has been your greatest professional achievement?**

For about a decade, I worked in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health space in Australia. My team and I at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute produced a suite of genetic and genomic health literacy resources (an animation and brochures) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. Presenting our work to the Queensland State Government was a major highlight.

#### **What aspects of your role do you enjoy the most?**

I enjoy contributing to work that has the goal of improving patient health outcomes. My role allows me to actively collaborate across multidisciplinary teams to implement

evidence-based interventions, patient education programmes, and streamlined care coordination initiatives designed to enhance patient engagement, increase health literacy, all of which I find very rewarding.

**What would be your second choice as a profession?**

As a second choice, I would be an Entrepreneur.

**What do you enjoy doing outside work?**

I enjoy gym workouts, football, and tennis, and love good food.

**Something most people don't know about you?**

Not many people know that I speak Spanish.



## GENERAL INSTITUTE NEWS

### 2025 European Conference on Development Psychology

28-29 August (Alina Marinca, Julia Michalek. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

Alina Marinca and Julia Michalek from the CPMH Youth Resilience Unit delivered presentations at the European Conference on Development Psychology (ECDP) in Vilnius, Lithuania. Alina presented on the impact of ADHD on physical, psychological and socioemotional outcomes in children from underserved communities, and Julia discussed a paper entitled 'Harnessing personal and social resources in managing internalising and externalising symptoms in children living in low-resource settings'. The ECDP brings together researchers and practitioners dedicated to advancing the field of developmental psychology.



### Nitrous oxide drivers causing chaos on London roads

30 August (Alastair Noyce. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

A *London Centric* [report](#) on increased numbers of London car drivers causing accidents while inhaling balloons of nitrous oxide at the wheel quotes Al Noyce on the drug's "dissociative effect" and how drivers losing control endanger themselves and others: "Cars are pretty much the most dangerous weapon that any of us are in control of" he said, noting that in East London, nitrous oxide use has become an "epidemic", causing spinal cord damage, including bladder and bowel problems: "The effects can be pretty severe, and even permanent." He added that the 2023 decision to make possession illegal has had no effect on nitrous oxide-related hospital admissions in Tower Hamlets (unlike the fall in cases noted by colleagues in Manchester, Nottingham, and Birmingham). He attributes this to the area's high deprivation, prevalence of mental health issues, drug supply, and gang culture.

## LONDON CENTRIC

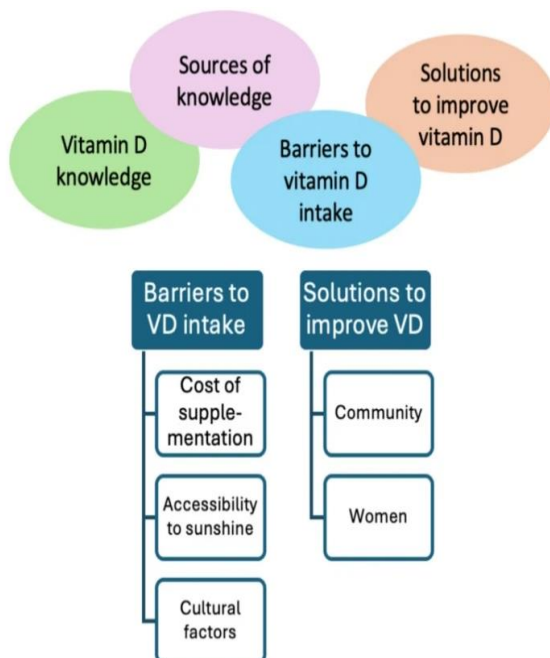
### "The gas and car scene": How drivers on nitrous oxide are causing chaos on the roads of London

By Rachel Rees



### Perceptions of vitamin D deficiency in E. London minority ethnic groups

1 September (Charlotte Zheng, Lola Oyebo. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

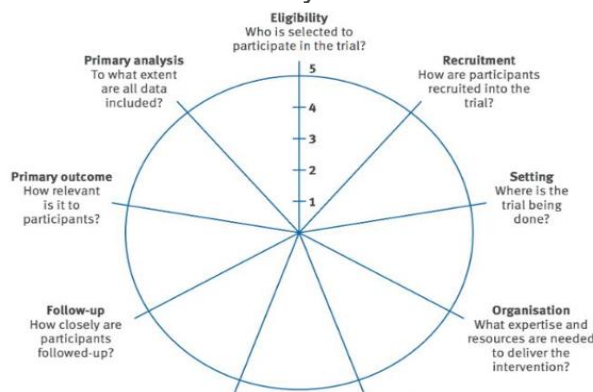


Exploring perceptions and attitudes about vitamin D deficiency (VDD) through interviews with people aged 60+ from minority ethnic groups in East London, researchers [find](#) limited knowledge of vitamin D, with few subjects able to identify dietary sources. Barriers identified included cost of supplementation, accessibility to sunshine, and cultural factors. Attitudes towards vitamin D supplementation were largely positive, but food fortification was more polarising. Targeted education was a suggested key solution, particularly for women (identified as central figures in most families). Authors say policy makers should develop approaches reflecting the needs and characteristics of the population.

### Retrospective use of the PRECIS-2 tool to assess design choices in RCTs

1 September (Clare Robinson. Centre for Evaluation and Methods)

The PRECIS-2 tool, widely used to align design and intended purpose of randomised trials, is now also being used retrospectively to assess pragmatism in published trials included in reviews. To assess the level of pragmatism in RCTs that cite PRECIS-2, this [study](#) compared agreement between independent ratings with a consensus scores reached by pairs of independent reviewers (a clinician and a methodologist in each case). In comparing 30 RCTs, neither tested method produced a reliable judgment using PRECIS-2. Agreed consensus scores from two reviewers were no more reliable than scores from a single reviewer. Additional analysis showed that simplifying the scoring from the original 5-point scale to 3-points may produce more reliable assessment of the pragmatism or 'explanatoriness' of published trials. Researchers conclude that this simpler method of scoring should be encouraged for retrospective use of PRECIS-2 in systematic reviews.



## Microplastics, pregnancy and the placenta: What we do and don't know

1 September (Priya Bhide. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

In a piece for [The Conversation](#) on the potential risks to fetal development of microplastics during pregnancy, Priya Bhide reflects that harmful exposures can increase the risk of chronic conditions later in life. Polystyrene nanoparticles accumulate in embryonic organs and cause slowed heart rate and reduced activity, and when inhaled by the mother can travel via the placenta to the fetal brain, causing oxidative damage, changing the levels of neurotransmitters and switching off genes needed for healthy brain development. As most studies have been in animals or controlled laboratory settings, how much microplastic material can accumulate in the placenta and fetus, and whether it can be cleared, is unknown. Priya issues an urgent call for research to understand whether microplastics pose a genuine threat to reproductive health and fetal development, which could contribute to policies on plastic production,

**THE CONVERSATION**

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

## Microplastics, pregnancy and the placenta: what we know and what we don't

Published: September 1, 2025 12:28pm BST

consumption and disposal, and inform advice for women in pregnancy.



### Latest Thinking In Between Podcast

1 September (Sara Papparini. Centre for Public Health and Policy)



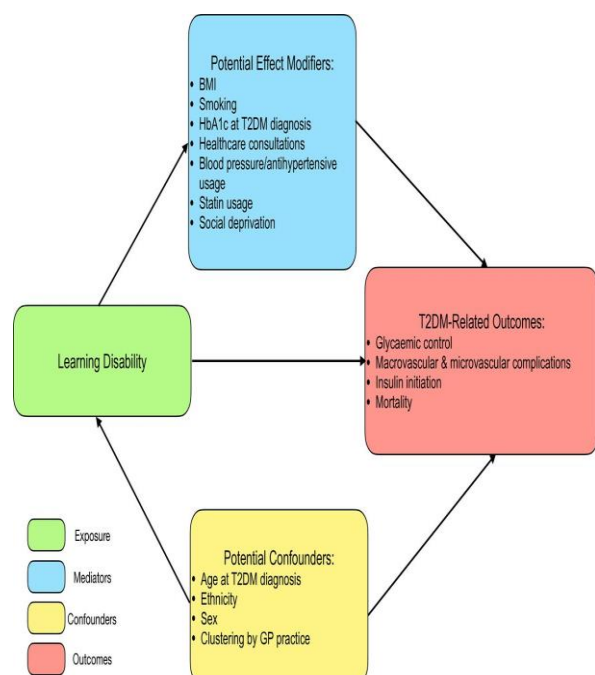
Knowledge is Power, Ian Hacking, and Racialisation

The latest episode in the *Thinking In Between* Podcast series features medical anthropologist and Senior Lecturer in Public Health and Equity, Sara Papparini, whose research began in HIV but has expanded to applying critical public health and anti-racist lenses to many other areas. Sara shares three big ideas: Knowledge is Power, Making People Up, and Racialisation.

### Impact of learning disabilities on management of T2 diabetes

2 September (Rohini Mathur. Centre for Primary Care)

An observational cohort study examines the impact of learning disabilities on type 2 diabetes (T2DM) control, therapeutic management, vascular outcomes, and mortality among 280,300 UK adults. At 5yrs post-diagnosis, people with learning disabilities had lower odds of poor glycaemic control and faster insulin initiation than those without learning disabilities. No differences were found in risk of vascular complications, but the risks of all-cause and diabetes-related mortality were doubled in those with learning disabilities. Authors say that future research into the mechanisms behind this higher risk of death is needed, to help reduce health disparities for people with T2DM and learning disabilities.

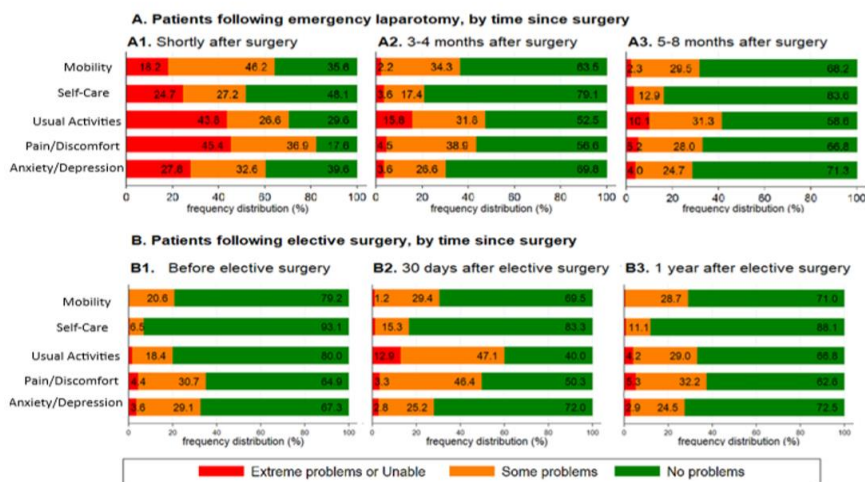


## Health related quality of life after emergency abdominal surgery

2 September (Vladimir Gordeev, Esubalew Assefa, Boby Mihaylova. Centre for Evaluation and Methods)

Using data from 686 patients who underwent emergency abdominal surgery, researchers track the trajectory and key determinants of quality of life (QoL) measurements, and assess the contribution of post-surgery patient characteristics over the following 8 months. A week after surgery the mean QoL utility score was 0.21, which improved among survivors to 0.74 at 3-8 months. Patient's sex and preoperative risk of mortality were key determinants of QoL shortly after surgery. In the medium to long term post-surgery period, time since surgery, patient's sex, Charlson Comorbidity index, ASA physical status and indication for surgery were key pre-surgery predictors of QoL. Post-surgery determinants of QoL in the medium to long term included duration of hospital admission for index surgery, and further days in hospital within 30 days prior to QoL measurement. The findings can help to inform clinician-patient discussions and assessments of the value of abdominal surgery interventions.

Figure S3. Quality of life after emergency abdominal surgery (A) and after elective abdominal surgery (B), by time since surgery



## Hydroxocobalamin self-injection for N<sub>2</sub>O-related myeloneuropathy

3 September (Mohamoud Hashi, Laura Smith, Marta Patyjewicz, Al Noyce. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

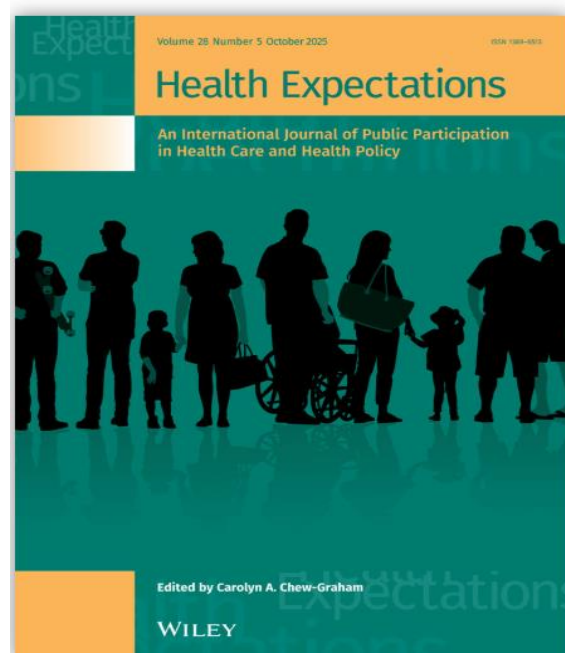


Treatment of nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O)-related neurotoxicity requires vitamin B12 replacement, usually via intramuscular (IM) hydroxocobalamin. In a [project](#) at the Royal London Hospital 46 patients (median age 23, 63% male and of Asian/Asian British ethnicity, 70% regularly using N<sub>2</sub>O) with N<sub>2</sub>O-induced neurological symptoms were given a choice of self-injecting or attending for nurse-led administration. Clinical outcomes, adherence and functional improvement (including the 10m walk test) were assessed. Self-injecting patients had higher adherence (79.7%v20.3%) than nurse-administered patients. Clinical recovery rates were comparable (74% achieving full or substantial improvement across both groups) and walking speed also improved, with no difference between groups. The study shows that hydroxocobalamin self-injection is a feasible and probably cost-effective alternative to nurse-led administration, while maintaining clinical efficacy.

### Lived experiences of long covid among UK ethnic minority groups

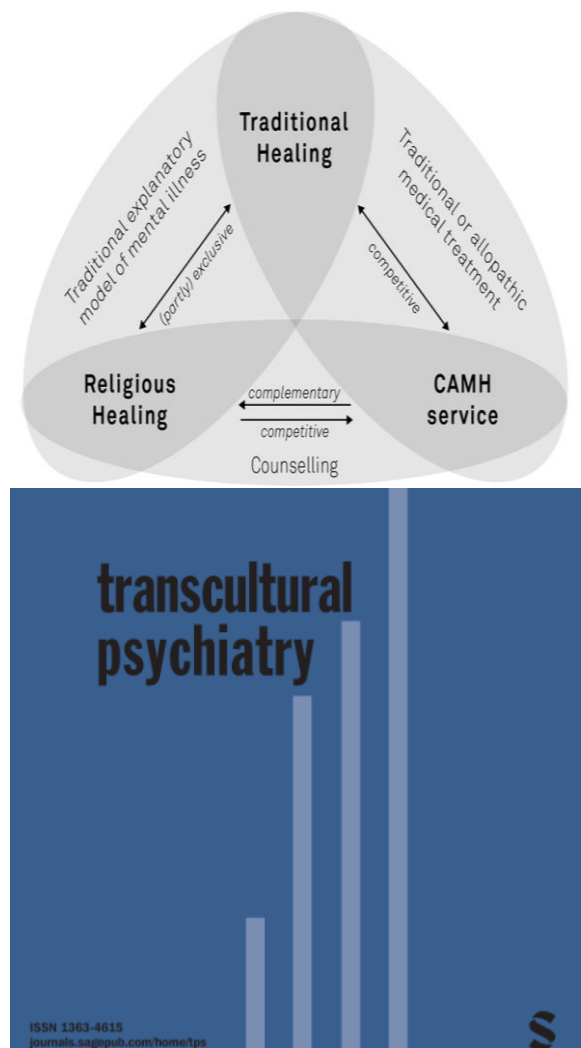
4 September (Dipesh Gopal. Centre for Primary Care)

In this interview study researchers [explore](#) how diverse experiences of long Covid among people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the UK are influenced by complexities like gender and socio-economic factors. Participants described challenges gaining support from health professionals, family and communities, with women and men describing distinctive difficulties. Financial capacity determined the type and extent of accessible care, and employer support influenced ability to take adequate time to recover and return to work. Authors say the interplay of comorbidities with long Covid could heighten the risk of more severe symptoms and [complicate](#) help-seeking and management of long Covid.



### Sierra Leone mental health services for young people: Caregiver perceptions

4 September (Andreas Papamichail. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

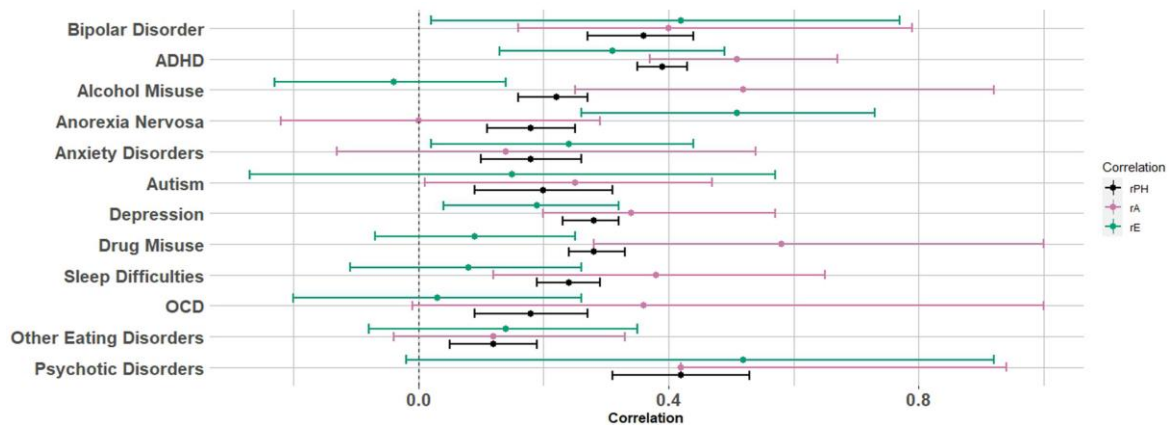


In Freetown (Sierra Leone) the Ola During Children's Hospital provides child and adolescent mental health (CAMH) service treatment based on biomedical understanding of mental illness, in contrast with the traditional Freetown mental health landscape which largely relies on supernatural and spiritual explanatory models. Thematic analysis of results from interviews with female caregivers of children and adolescents with mental illness, traditional healers, religious healers, and mental health nurses show that (i) biomedical explanations about children's mental health conditions were well received by care seekers, and help to improve their understanding of the condition and ways to deal with it; (ii) the concept of explanatory models can help to understand caregivers' help-seeking behaviours (though this concept has to be taken as flexible, and people adapt to what they are exposed to); and (iii) a scale-up of CAMH services should include awareness-raising among health practitioners, and show itself open to cooperate with non-biomedical practitioners under certain conditions.

### Subclinical hypomania, psychiatric and neurodevelopmental diagnoses

6 September (Georgina Hosang. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

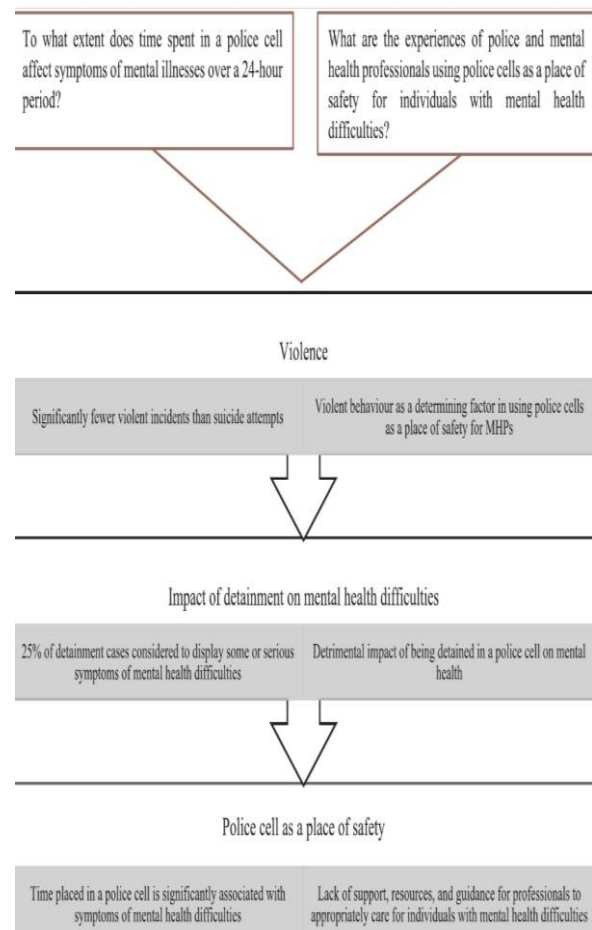
Subclinical hypomanic symptoms are linked to psychiatric and neurodevelopmental conditions, but the genetic and environmental origins of these associations are unclear. In 4932 pairs from the Child and Adolescent Twin Study in Sweden, researchers assessed hypomania symptoms at age 18 via a parent questionnaire, and used population registry data to ascertain diagnoses of 14 conditions and symptoms. Subclinical hypomania was significantly associated with all 14 diagnoses, with highest odds for psychotic disorders. Non-shared environmental correlations were highest for psychotic disorders and lowest for body dissatisfaction. For bipolar, psychotic and ADHD disorders, genetic and nonshared environmental correlations with subclinical hypomania were of a similar magnitude. The association between subclinical hypomania and the diagnosis of multiple psychiatric phenotypes highlights its important role in the developmental pathway to clinical disorders, its complex origins, and that it may represent a quantitative trait for various psychiatric phenotypes.



## Using police cells to house people with mental health difficulties in Iceland

7 September (Rannveig Asparadóttir, Hannah Jones, Alan Underwood, Jennifer Hopton, Georgina Mathlin. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

In Iceland, people with mental health difficulties may be detained in police cells when psychiatrists consider patients unsuitable for ward admission. Using records of detainees' visible mental illness symptoms and interviews with mental health professionals and police, researchers investigated whether detainment in police cells affected symptoms. Records showed that 72.1% of suicide attempts and 77.3% of self-harming behaviours occurred in the initial 4hrs of detainment. Interviews generated 3 themes: violent behaviour as a determining factor in using police cells as a place of safety, the detrimental impact of detainment in police cells on mental health, and lack of support and resources for professionals to appropriately care for individuals with mental health difficulties. The study concludes that police cells are not suitable places of safety in Iceland, and that new laws are needed to support police and mental health professionals to adequately provide safety for individuals with mental health difficulties.



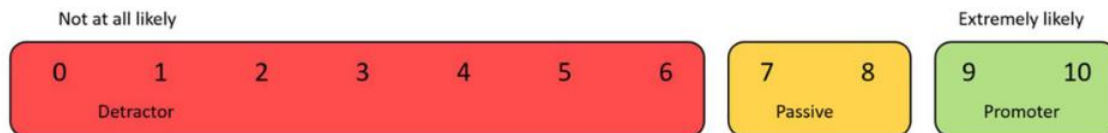
## Enhanced recovery following hip fractures

8 September (Adam Gordon. Centre for Primary Care)

To develop a cohesive Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) pathway for hip fracture patients, a survey study received responses from 51 institutions and trauma professionals rating preoperative, perioperative, and postoperative interventions for

inclusion. Highly rated preoperative interventions included nerve blockade and delirium risk assessment. Avoidance of intraoperative hypotension was the only perioperative high scoring intervention. Key postoperative interventions included geriatric review and Day 0 mobilization. Some 87.5% of respondents were willing to join a trial comparing ERAS with standard care. Authors say a robust enhanced recovery protocol is required to standardize care and optimize outcomes, and this paper is the first step in developing this guideline.

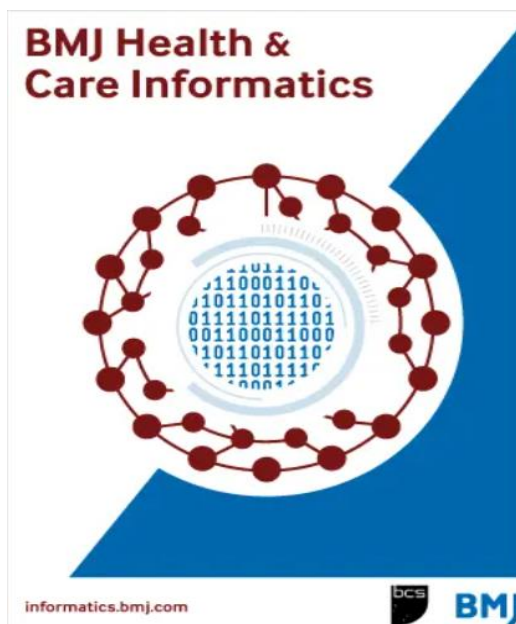
*How likely is it that you would recommend our company/service to a friend or colleague?*



*What is the main reason for your score?*

### Circadian rest-activity rhythm and all-cause mortality risk in cancer patients

9 September (Yue Liu, Centre for Preventive Neurology)



Using data from 7456 UK Biobank cancer patients who wore accelerometers for 2yrs, researchers examining associations between circadian rest-activity rhythm (CRAR) and the risk of mortality from all-cause, cancer, and cardiovascular disease find that 934 (12.5%) deaths occurred over 9yrs. CRAR disruptions (particularly low amplitude) exceeded multiple traditional risk factors, such as poor sleep, smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, and unhealthy diet, in predicting mortality. Authors say that CRAR parameters may serve as novel and robust predictors of mortality in patients with cancer.

### Psychological responses to a cancer signal detection

9 September (Laura Marlow, Ninian Schmeising-Barnes, Jo Waller. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)



Multi-cancer detection (MCED) blood tests have potential to screen for early-stage cancers. In participants from the NHS Galleri Trial, researchers investigated the impact of cancer expectations on psychological responses following a 'cancer signal detected' result. The study showed that expectations of cancer played a pivotal role in responses, and were influenced by participants' experiences of health and symptoms. Predicted cancer signals made sense when consistent with family history or health issues, and views of healthiness or lack of family history were sometimes used to self-reassure. Authors suggest that support could be designed around participant expectations of cancer at each stage of MCED screening.

### MS Society Blog series

9 September (Heather Mah, Emily Tregaskis-Daniels, Hiba Adan. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

The final blog in a series about MS from PhD students in the Centre for Preventive Neurology has now been published by the MS Society. The three blogs are authored by Heather Mah (*Making it easier to have your say in MS Research*), Emily Tregaskis-Daniels (*What happens before MS? Looking at infection patterns in the years before diagnosis*), and Hiba Adan (*The journey to a diagnosis*). The three articles were all shortlisted submissions to the MS Society writing competition, with Heather's piece the winning article.

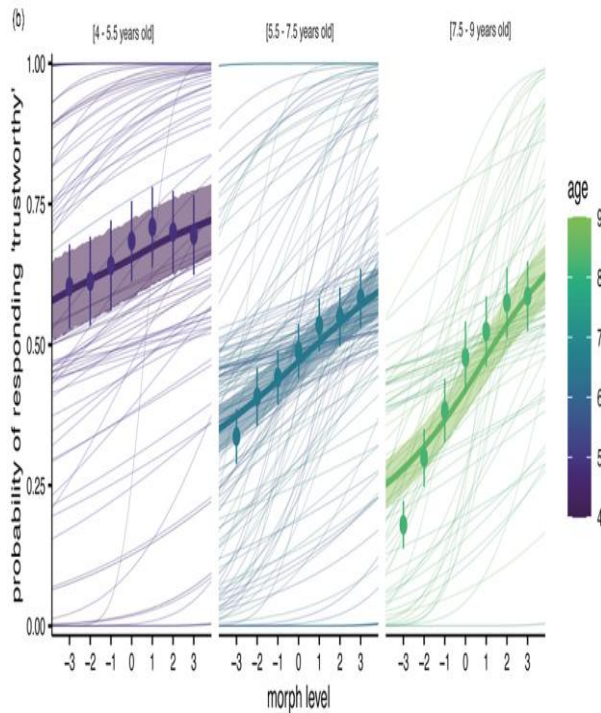
**Making it easier to have your say in MS research**  
Wed 20 August 2025 | Heather Mah

**What happens before MS? Looking at infection patterns in the years before diagnosis**  
Wed 27 August 2025 | Emily Tregaskis-Daniels

**The journey to a diagnosis**  
Tue 09 September 2025 | Hiba Adan

### Trust perception in Syrian refugee children

10 September (Julia Michalek. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

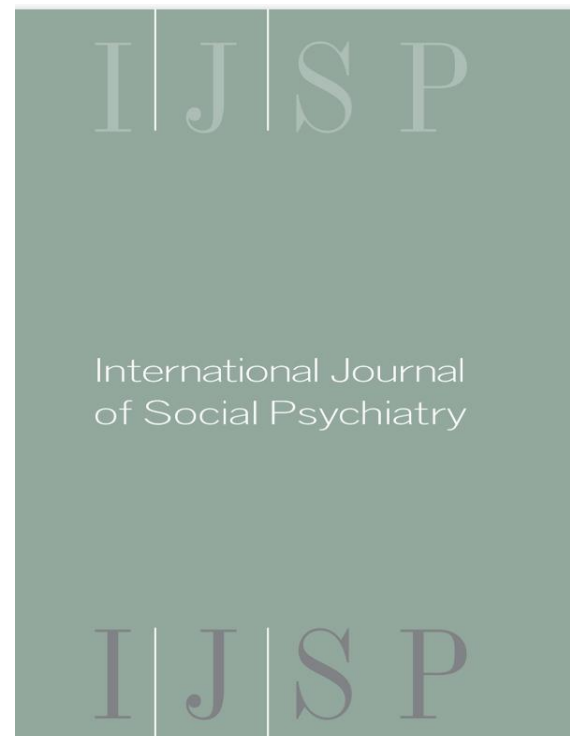


To address a lack of knowledge about trust perception in refugee contexts, researchers measured trust perception in Syrian refugee children displaced in Jordan, using a task with computer-generated faces varying in perceived trustworthiness. Mothers reported on the mental health of children and mothers, and the mother-child relationship, but results showed no association between child trust perception and these factors. The study identified age-related changes in perceived trust, with older children reporting faces as less trustworthy than younger children. Authors say that the mental health of refugee children does not seem to be linked to their perception of trust, and that trusting others might diminish with age in displaced, at-risk children.

### Help seeking for depression, anxiety, and stress in ASEAN countries

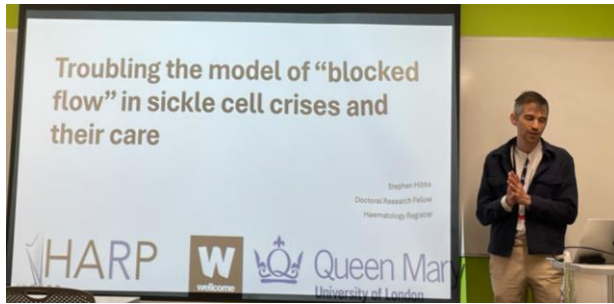
10 September (Jennifer Lau. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

A systematic review of 46 studies identifies barriers and facilitators to accessing formal psychological help for common mental health disorders in Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) countries. Barriers included social and cultural factors (stigma, sociocultural and religious, and treatment-related issues), personal factors (eg. low mental health knowledge, self-reliance and disclosure difficulty), and structural factors (related to low availability and affordability of mental health services). The facilitators were social and cultural factors related to social and religious aspects, personal factors (motivation, presence and severity of mental health problems, and mental health literacy), and structural factors (eg. accessibility and the system of mental health services, and gender differences).



### British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Conference

11 September (Stephen Hibbs. Centre for Primary Care)



Stephen Hibbs presented his research in a talk to the British Sociological Association Medical Sociology conference, held at the University of Northumbria in Newcastle on 11 September. The title of his talk was "Troubling the model of blocked flow in sickle cell crises and their care".

### **£2 million from Alzheimer's Society to fund new WIPH-led GRACE centre**

11 September (Claudia Cooper, Jessica Budgett. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

An award of £2 million from Alzheimer's Society will fund groundbreaking research to tackle healthcare inequalities and improve care access for people living with dementia in the UK. The grant funds the GRACE (Goal-directed Accessible, Equitable, evidence-based post-diagnostic Care) Better Dementia Care for Everyone programme, to be launched in Spring 2026 and led by WIPH researchers Claudia Cooper and Jessica Budgett. The programme will adapt existing NIDUS Family resources to ensure that they are accessible for under-served groups (eg by considering language barriers and culturally appropriate care), and will start with people living with dementia in areas with among the worst national levels of health inequalities, in Belfast, Humber and North Yorkshire, NE London, and Kent and Medway.



### **Adverse outcomes in assisted vaginal birth and 2nd-stage C-section**

12 September (Marcus Cabrera-Dandy, Elena Greco, Matina Iliodromiti. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

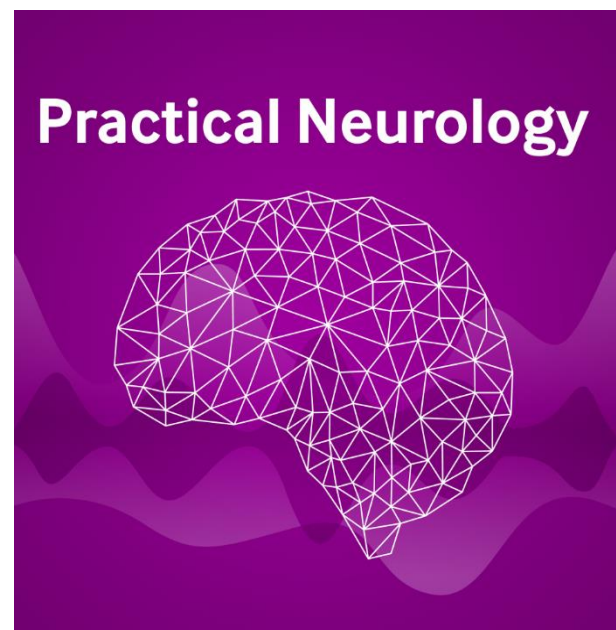


Using data from 751,242 participants in 241 studies published from 2001-2023, researchers assess the effectiveness of different instruments for assisted vaginal birth (AVB) and the prevalence of maternal and neonatal adverse outcomes associated with AVB and second-stage caesarean section (SCS). Prevalence estimates for AVB failure and adverse outcomes varied widely. Compared with AVB, SCS was associated with significantly higher rates of NICU admission, low Apgar scores, skull fractures, and neonatal death. From contemporary data authors conclude that, while AVB carries specific risks, it may offer advantages over emergency SCS, particularly regarding neonatal outcomes.


### Importance of effective communication in biosimilar medication rollouts

14 September (Ruth Dobson. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

In an editorial discussing concerns when switching to biosimilar medications for neurological disease, Ruth Dobson discusses the recent switch from branded originator natalizumab (Tysabri) to the biosimilar formulation Tyruko. The anti-JC virus antibody test accompanying Tyruko overestimated progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy risk (though it does not underestimate risk so safety is not compromised), resulting in withdrawals from treatment, intensive safety monitoring, and increased patient and clinician anxiety and burden on healthcare services. Ruth notes the need for support for patients switching from a familiar brand, and for a responsive service that can answer questions and reassure in a timely manner, and suggests that cost savings resulting from biosimilar roll-outs could directly support services with this crucial 'invisible' work. She advocates for systematic monitoring following treatment switching to be embedded into biosimilar roll-out programmes to reassure both patients and clinicians that adverse events would be detected in a timely manner, and suggests that staggered roll-



### Biosimilar rollouts: practice, pitfalls and the importance of effective communication

Ruth Dobson ,<sup>1,2</sup> Rachel Dorsey,<sup>3</sup> James Varley,<sup>3</sup> David Paling,<sup>4</sup> Joela Mathews,<sup>2</sup> Tarunya Arun ,<sup>5,6</sup> Alasdair J Coles <sup>7</sup>

out, starting with the treatment naïve, may limit the nocebo effect in patients and healthcare professionals.

**BMJ**Journals

**Many thanks to all who so enthusiastically contribute. Please send any news items for the next newsletter to [j.a.mackie@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:j.a.mackie@qmul.ac.uk)**