

**WOLFSON INSTITUTE OF POPULATION HEALTH
NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 77: 30 May 2025**

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

FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues

Many of you have been away for this half term week. I hope you've had a great break.

A few weeks ago, I announced that, after advertising Course leadership roles across WIPH, we were delighted to appoint Catherine Carr as deputy course director for the MSc Psychological therapies onsite. She formally takes up her role from 1 June. Unfortunately, there were no applications for the role of MSc Psychological therapies onsite course director. We thank Dora Dallas for her service in this role, from which she steps down on 31 May. Hannah Jones will act as interim director on the course, for up to a year, working closely with Catherine. I wish them both and all the course team well, and thank them for their hard work supporting students at this difficult time, managing several key staff absences.

It is also a busy time for all our education colleagues as we progress end of year marking - many thanks for all this hard work. As you'll see below, our research colleagues have also been as busy as ever, with plenty of quality outputs, and some making waves among the popular press and the public. Great work!

Finally, another reminder that our annual WIPH Showcase will be held on 17 June. Everyone is very welcome - please [sign up](#). We will be making our annual awards during the afternoon. Nominations are open [here](#).

As our Institute is co-located across Charterhouse Square and Whitechapel, it is important to take opportunities to spend time with colleagues and hear about all our exciting work. Do join us!

With best wishes

Fiona



MEET WIPH

MEET - Faiza Durrani (PostDoc Research Associate, CPN)

How would you describe your roles and responsibilities?

I am involved in two neurodegenerative research projects: DIADEM (Digital Auditory Assessments for Early Diagnosis of Dementia) and the Michael J Fox Foundation-funded London-Pakistan Parkinson's Project. In my primary role for DIADEM I am responsible for developing SOPs, managing site files, partner site training, coordinating participant recruitment, overseeing data collection and analysis, and contributing to publications and conference presentations. As site Principal Investigator for the LPPP I deliver partner site training and oversee the collection, analysis, and quality control of clinical data and biospecimens to meet international standards. I am also the EDI Co-Lead for the Alzheimer's Research UK London Network, where I deliver workshops on diversity and inclusion, extending my commitment to equity in research beyond individual projects.

What has been your greatest professional achievement?

A highlight was receiving the Excellent Research Support Award at the QM Research & Innovation Awards in 2023, in recognition of my contributions to improving engagement with the S. Asian community in the Genes & Health project. I helped develop accessible research materials, facilitated multilingual workshops, and provided guidance on culturally relevant strategies, all of which improved recruitment and trust in underserved groups. The award underscores my ongoing commitment to inclusive research practices.

What aspects of your role do you enjoy the most?

I enjoy applying research in real-world settings, especially through training, education, and inclusive practices. Collaborating across countries and disciplines, whether in Pakistan or East London, makes the work meaningful and globally relevant.

What would be your second choice as a profession?

If not for biomedical research, I would have pursued science communication and public education, particularly in underrepresented communities. I founded a small company to deliver hands-on science workshops in local libraries and schools in Newham, and trained women from ethnic minority backgrounds to lead STEM sessions - helping to build confidence and leadership skills. The intersection of science, education, and community empowerment continues to motivate me.

What do you enjoy doing outside work?

I enjoy gardening and spending quality time with my family. We often garden together, and I also enjoy painting as a creative outlet.

Something most people don't know about you?

Most people don't know that I grew up, immersed in traditional Asian values, in the culturally rich city of Lahore. I have a deep appreciation for Urdu poetry and have always been fascinated by the historical monuments and scenic landscapes of northern Pakistan. Additionally, I once qualified for the civil services examination, which was a significant achievement in my life.

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GENERAL INSTITUTE NEWS

New Health Inquiry: Improving Access to Primary Care Services

12 May (Veline L'Esperance, Centre for Primary Care)

Veline L'Esperance has been appointed to the Steering Group of 'Improving Access to Primary Care Services', a new inquiry launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Health Group to develop coordinated policy solutions that deliver lasting

improvements in primary care services beyond electoral cycles. The inquiry brings together experts from across general practice, dentistry, pharmacy, and optometry to develop sustainable, cross-party policy solutions that tackle longstanding challenges in access, equity, and integration. Co-chaired by a cross-party group of parliamentarians the enquiry is a vital opportunity to address widening health inequalities and shape the future of Primary Care in the UK.



BMJ Editorial: Enteral tube feeding

15 May (Nathan Davies, Victoria Vickerstaff, Elizabeth L Sampson. Centres for Psychiatry and Mental Health/Evaluation and Methods)

Reflecting on recommendations against tube feeding for people with severe dementia when eating problems are due to disease progression, a BMJ Editorial notes that evidence and better awareness is leading to a decline in use of enteral tube feeding. Existing UK resources for management of nutrition and hydration include a clinical decision guide, a framework to streamline end-of-life decision making for professionals, and targeted materials for families, tools that offer invaluable practical guidance. The editorial concludes that collecting accurate information on the use of enteral tube feeding in people with dementia, across all settings and countries, is imperative to help improve understanding of the clinical landscape and where support should be targeted.

EDITORIALS

Harms of enteral tube feeding

Multiple complexities in decision making require a careful approach

Nathan Davies,¹ Kanthee Anantapong,² Victoria Vickerstaff,³ Elizabeth L Sampson⁴

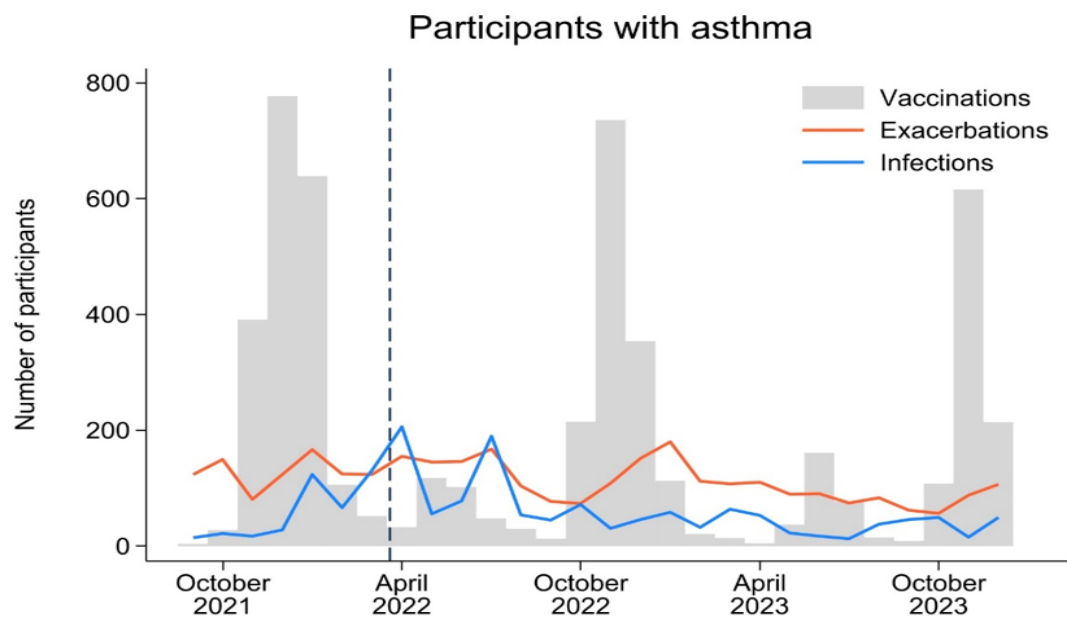


COVID infection and associated asthma exacerbation by time since booster

15 May (Mohammad Talaei, Seif Shaheen. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

Using data from the COVIDENCE UK study, a longitudinal analysis examines the association between time since COVID-19 booster vaccination and breakthrough infection characteristics, whether incident COVID-19 is associated with asthma

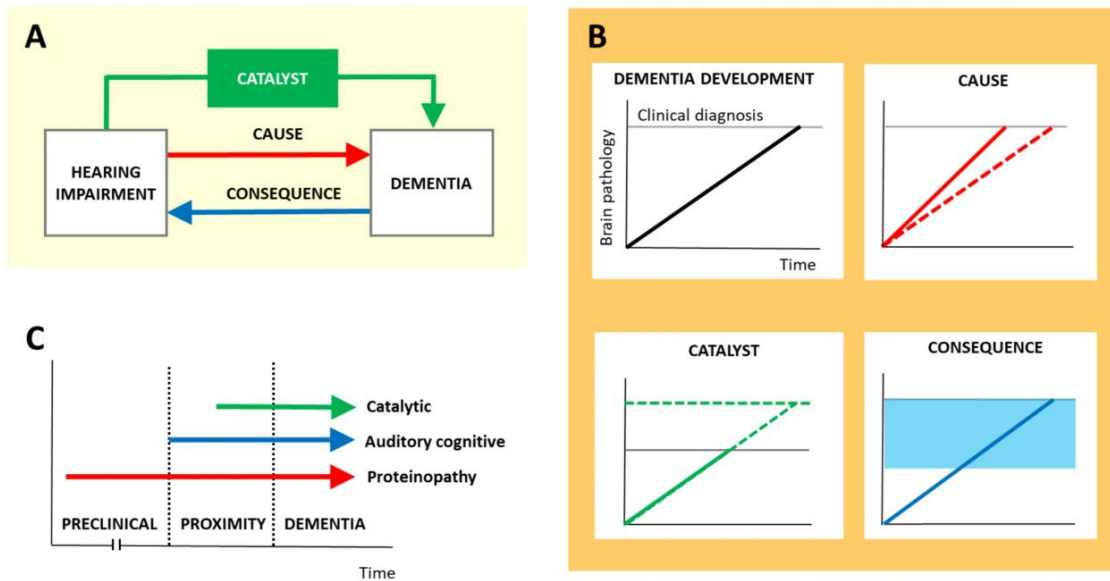
exacerbations, and if those exacerbations are affected by time since vaccination. Longer time since vaccination was associated with increased odds of severe symptoms, and longer time to recovery. Among 2100 participants with asthma, incident COVID-19 was associated with increased risk of asthma exacerbation, both within 12 months of vaccination and later, with a greater difference in point estimates when considering severe exacerbations. Authors say their findings highlight the importance of eligible candidates receiving their boosters, and the need for research on further vaccinations in people with asthma who are no longer eligible for boosters.



Hearing impairment and dementia: cause, catalyst or consequence?

16 May (Avi Chandra, Charles Marshall. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

The nature of the link between hearing and dementia remains unclear - hearing impairment could cause, catalyse, or be a consequence of neurodegenerative pathology and cognitive decline. Researchers use this framework to examine different lines of evidence for the association between hearing impairment and dementia, and consider how this evidence speaks to potential mechanisms and treatment implications. Their [paper](#) considers practical clinical implications for management of patients with hearing impairment and dementia, the potential role for central hearing tests as 'auditory biomarkers' of dementia, and the need for further research in this field.



RCT of an intervention teaching calming skills for Ukrainian children

16 May (Dennis Ougrin, Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

An RCT of a digital mental health intervention (Project Calm) teaching calming skills for Ukrainian children assesses acceptability, utility, and clinical efficacy relative to a usual schoolwork control among a sample of 626 year 4-11 Ukrainian students. The lack of professional mental health help for Ukraine's war-exposed youth means that evaluating digital mental health interventions which require minimal clinician support is recommended. **Results** showed that although Calm was perceived favourably, there were no significant between-group differences in the full sample. Authors suggest testing other strategies delivered by digital mental health interventions and that calming skills continue to be taught in provider-guided formats.

Fig. 2: BFS Internalizing Scores Across Time, by Condition, in the Full Sample.

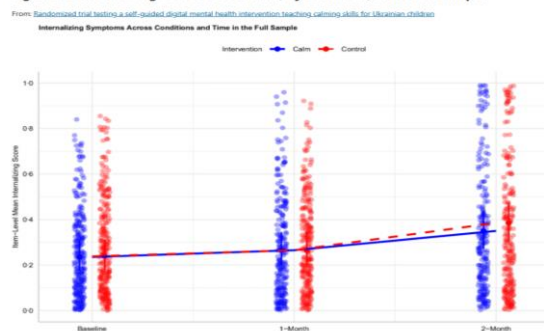
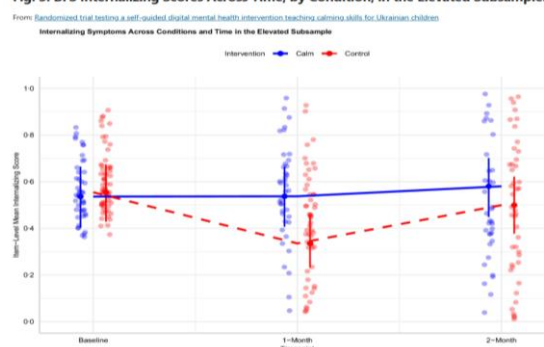


Fig. 3: BFS Internalizing Scores Across Time, by Condition, in the Elevated Subsample.



Social prescribing to support mental health in young people

17 May (Aisling Murray, Francois van Loggerenberg, Jennifer Lau, Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)

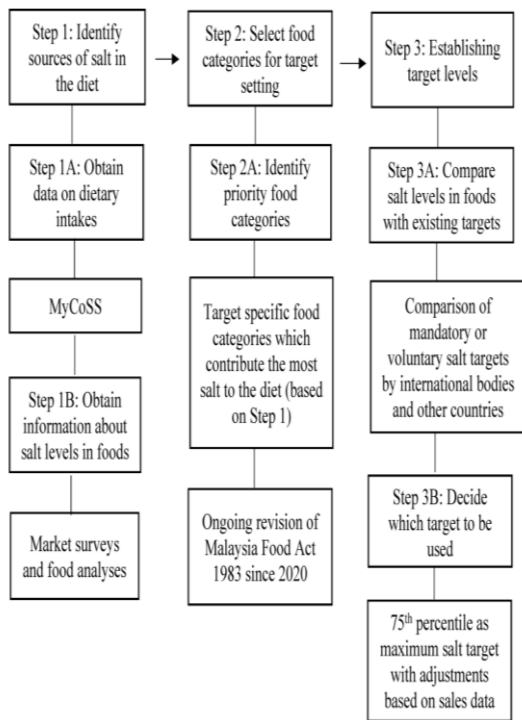
A qualitative study explores the active ingredients and contextual factors of social prescribing (SP), an holistic approach using community resources to empower individuals in managing their health, in supporting mental health in children and young people (CYP). Interviews with 19 professionals involved in delivering SP to CYP with mental health difficulties identified 4 active ingredients: (1) SP offers an

holistic approach, tailoring programmes to a young person's needs, interests and their readiness, (2) SP offers young people an opportunity to exercise agency in defining their care pathway and engaging in their recovery journey, (3) The development of a professional but unpressured supportive relationship with a skilled adult is an important factor in SP, and (4) SP offers a safe space for young people to discuss their emotional needs and health. Contextual factors influencing SP delivery were: (1) Supportive organisational environments, (2) Parental buy-in, (3) Public awareness, and (4) Barriers to access. Defining these active ingredients and contextual factors can help consolidate SP for CYP's mental health, contributing to its wider adoption and impact.



Malaysian salt reduction policy: proposed targets for processed foods

19 May (Sonia Pombo-Rodrigues, Feng He, Graham MacGregor. Centre for Public Health and Policy)



Malaysia's Salt Reduction Strategy targets a daily intake of <6.0g by 2025, but the lack of maximum salt targets for food businesses to attain poses a challenge to the effectiveness of salt reduction efforts. This [paper](#) presents a 3 step plan to 1) identify major contributors to dietary salt; 2) select target food categories; and 3) establish target levels. In total, 14 food categories were selected for target setting, and a 75th percentile sodium level was selected as the maximum salt target (reduced by a further 10-20% based on sales data). Researchers say further engagement with stakeholders is needed, and that monitoring mechanisms are needed to support implementation of maximum salt targets and evaluate consumer behaviour changes.

Understanding the social drivers of youth mental ill health in central Asia

19 May (Fiona Samuels, Aisling Murray, Laura Paulauskaite, Jennifer Lau. Centres for Public Health and Policy/Psychiatry and Mental Health)

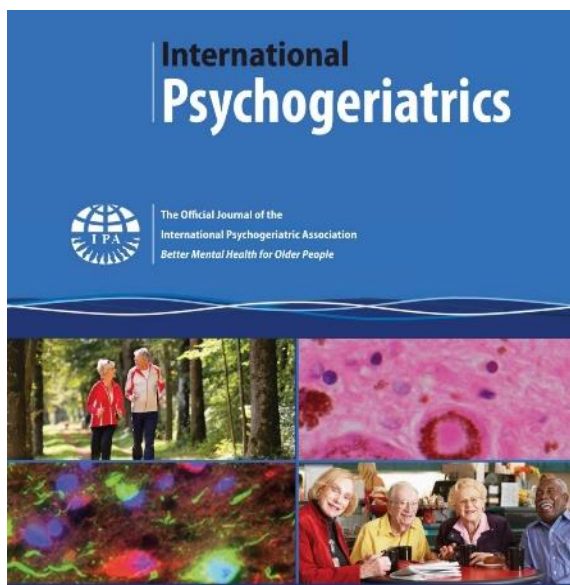
In Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), young people are exposed to poverty, social exclusion, and gender inequality, making exploitative practices such as child labour and child marriage common and exposing young people to discrimination, abuse and violence. Investment in youth mental health interventions is scarce. Following stakeholder meetings in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, researchers propose an approach to support mental health in young people in central Asia: 1) develop mental health literacy and raise awareness, through school programmes or community structures; 2) conduct research to identify who is most at risk and what socio-culturally appropriate policies would best support these populations; 3) strengthen mental health systems (eg. training lay mental health workers); 4) ensure that interventions and research are context-specific and relevant for young people, using co-designed approaches so that end users are involved in matters affecting their health and wellbeing.

THE LANCET Child & Adolescent Health



Dementia training for healthcare professionals

19 May (Sedigheh Zabihi, Malvika Muralidhar, Charlotte Kenten, Claudia Cooper. Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health)



A systematic review of 63 primary research studies examines the effectiveness of dementia training for healthcare professionals and considers implications for policy and practice in England. Only one study, evaluating a Train-the-Trainer team-based reflective practice model that improved primary care nurses' and doctors' learning, and self-reported practice over ≥ 3 months met priority criteria. Authors conclude that by increasing the reach of dementia training and embedding learning in practice, Train-the-Trainer models can increase care quality and support evidence-based policy implementation.

Experiences of faecal immunological testing in people with Lynch syndrome

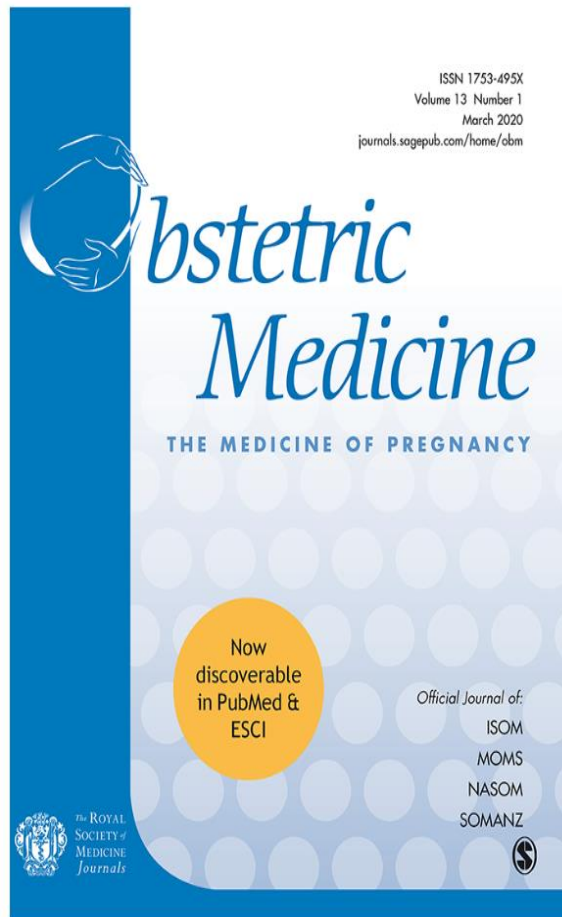
19 May (Jo Waller, Peter Sasieni. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

An evaluation of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of people with Lynch syndrome (LS) towards faecal immunochemical testing (FIT) as an adjunct to colonoscopy for colorectal cancer surveillance finds that FIT is widely perceived as an acceptable supplemental tool among those surveyed. Among the 85% of participants who rated FIT positively, 90% were confident in using the test correctly. Women reported higher anxiety than men (7.8% v 2%). Thematic analysis revealed gratitude for the convenience of FIT during healthcare disruptions, but emphasised concerns about its accuracy. Researchers conclude that future research should evaluate long-term outcomes and explore diverse population perspectives to guide FIT implementation in LS surveillance.



Maternal Medicine Hub: impact on post-partum haemorrhage

20 May (Man Ho Kwok, Mandeep Kaler. Centre for Public Health and Policy)



An evaluation of the effects on post-partum haemorrhage (PPH) management in women with inherited bleeding disorders (IBDs) in the maternal medicine network hub at the Royal London Hospital presents data on haemoglobin levels, estimated blood loss, and PPH severity in 63 patients with IBDs from 2020-23. The study follows a previous study at the centre that demonstrated persistently high PPH rates in women with IBDs despite adherence to guidelines. Results show that PPH rates above 500 mL and 1000 mL were significantly higher in the IBD group, but massive obstetric haemorrhage (MOH - very severe PPH >1500 mL) was not significantly different from that in the general obstetric population. Authors conclude that multidisciplinary care at the hub may mitigate the risk of extreme blood loss in women with IBDs, and say that the work highlights the necessity of specialised care in improving outcomes for women with IBDs during childbirth.

Enhanced UK breast screening could detect an extra 3500 cancers per year

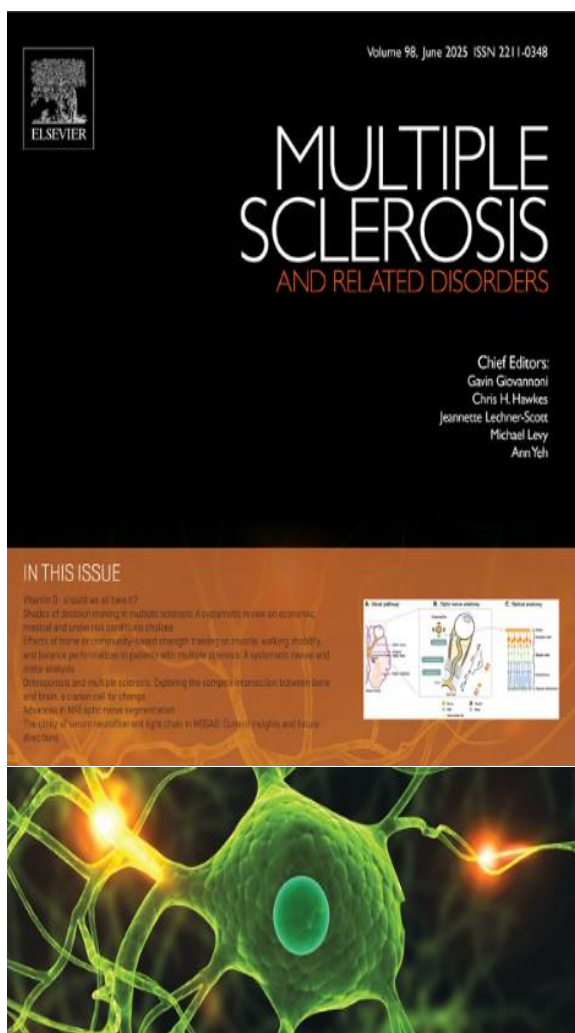
21 May (Stephen Duffy, Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

Researchers on the BRAID trial are calling for additional scans to be added to breast screening for women with very dense breasts, following the *Lancet* publication of the trial results. The results show that extra scans could treble cancer detection for these women, and potentially save up to 700 lives a year in the UK. In over 9000 UK women with dense breasts who had had a negative (no cancer) mammogram result, the study identified 85 cancers. Per 1000 women screened, two of the methods, (contrast enhanced mammography, CEM and abbreviated magnetic resonance imaging, AB-MRI) detected 17 and 19 cancers, respectively, that were not seen in mammograms. Authors say that adding either of these methods to existing breast screening could detect 3,500 more cancers per year in the UK. Estimates suggest that screening reduces mortality for about 20% of cancers detected, which could mean an extra 700 lives saved each year. Methodology Lead and Senior Author, WIPH Emeritus Professor Stephen Duffy, said: "*The NHS Breast Screening Programme has made a huge difference to many lives. Thanks to these results we can see that the technology exists to make screening even better, particularly for the 10% of women with dense breast tissue.*" The results were widely covered in the press.



UK consensus statement: serological JCV testing with natalizumab biosimilar

22 May (Ruth Dobson. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

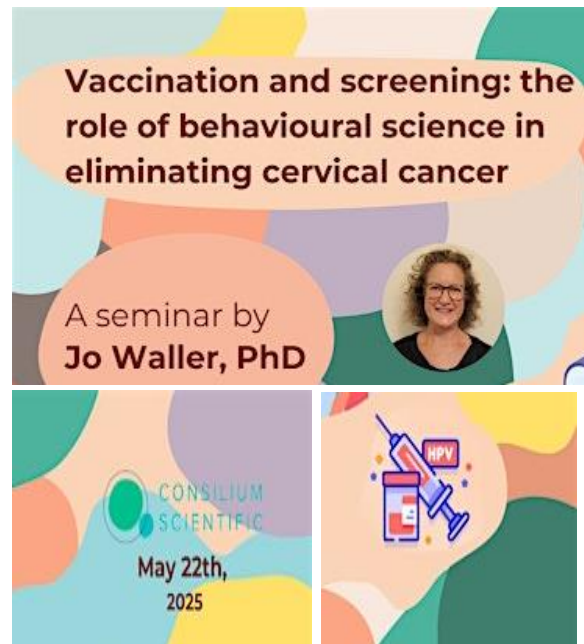


Natalizumab is a highly effective treatment for multiple sclerosis. A biosimilar natalizumab is being rolled out in the UK. Mandatory in safety monitoring for patients on natalizumab is serological testing for the virus JCV, which has previously been provided by the biotechnology company Biogen using the StratifyJCV assay, but in patients who switch to the biosimilar natalizumab, serological testing is provided using the Immunowell assay. In a consensus statement, authors present recommendations as a temporary solution to the unfortunate situation where a new tool to inform risk prediction (the new JCV assay) has been introduced without the evidence needed to enable its interpretation. They call for a publicly developed standardised JCV assay to ensure uniform, reliable results across biosimilar preparations, and say that the current challenges have highlighted the importance of decoupling “wrap around” services from pharmaceutical companies, particularly where these are crucial for safe and effective treatment delivery.

Role of behavioural science in eliminating cervical cancer

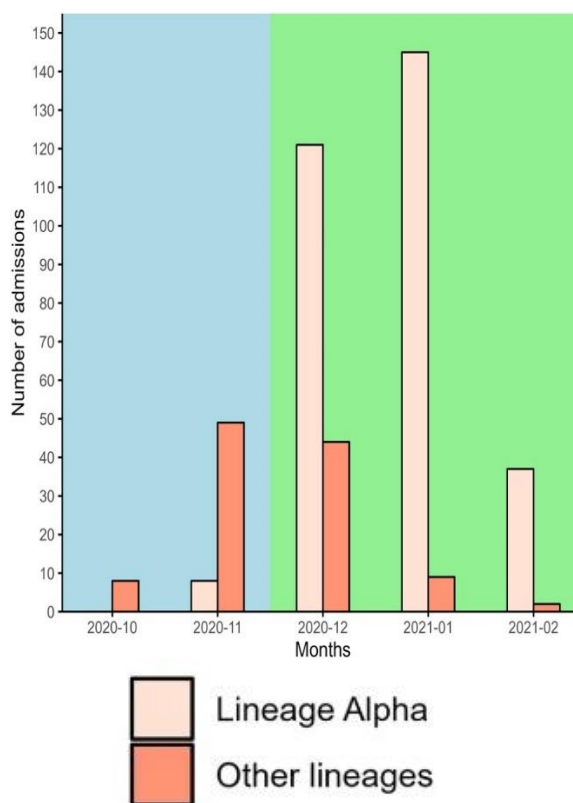
22 May (Jo Waller. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

At a Consilium Scientific online seminar on 22 May, Jo Waller presented a talk on 'Vaccination and screening: The role of behavioural science in eliminating cervical cancer'. Jo discussed the role of behavioural science in understanding and maximising uptake of HPV vaccination and cervical screening. She concluded that behavioural science can inform policy development and roll-out, to maximise acceptability of vaccination and screening, to understand barriers and facilitators of uptake, and to optimise communication. Consilium Scientific is an independent non-profit organization with a goal to improve clinical research through scientific rigour and transparency.



Dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 variants in Barts Trust COVID-19 patients

24 May (Adam Brentnall. Centre for Evaluation and Methods)

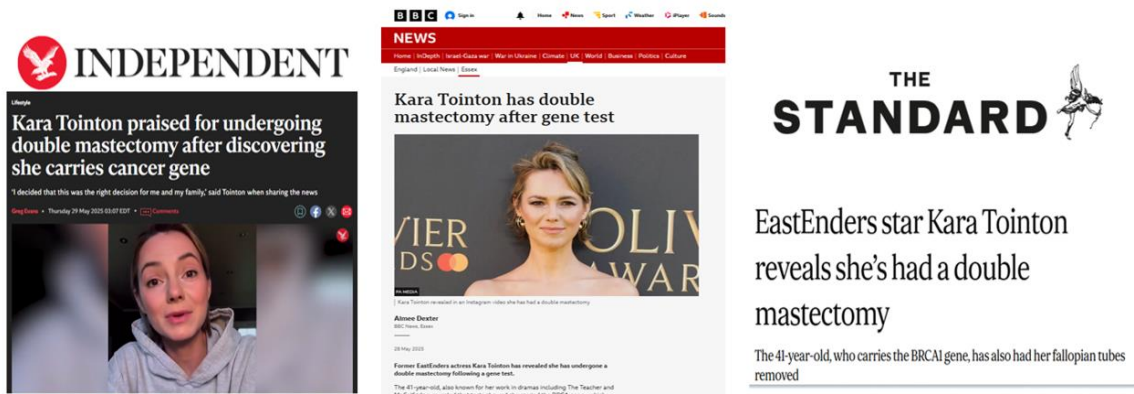


An analysis of the dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 variants conducted in 423 Barts Health NHS Trust patients from the CLIMB database considers clinical outcomes in a group with the B.1.1.7 variant v a group with all other variants. SARS-CoV-2 genome sequencing was conducted for patients admitted between Oct 2020-March 2021. Analysis of clinical outcomes (including mortality rates and deterioration within 28 days, adjusted for confounding factors including age and comorbidities) revealed a significant increase in mortality with age for both groups. Authors say that their results underscore the importance of age adjustment in clinical studies to accurately assess the impact of different variants, and that consistent genomic sequencing and data completeness are crucial to obtain reliable results and guide public health responses.

Strictly Come Dancing winner promotes the PROTECTOR trial

28 May (Ranjit Manchanda and the PROTECTOR team. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

Wide media coverage has shared the personal story of Kara Tointon, actor and former *Strictly Come Dancing* winner, who has spoken publicly about her discovery that she carries a BRCA gene and her choice to undergo preventive surgeries. In addition to a double mastectomy, the *EVE* appeal ambassador has now also had her fallopian tubes removed, as a participant in the PROTECTOR study. The trial, led by Ranjit Manchanda, is a multicentre, national prospective cohort surgical study for premenopausal women at increased risk of developing ovarian cancer because of a genetic mutation or a strong family history of ovarian and breast cancer, or ovarian cancer alone. PROTECTOR offers women a new alternative two-step surgery to prevent ovarian cancer, a procedure known as risk reducing early salpingectomy with delayed oophorectomy.



Association between lower lung function and cardiovascular mortality


30 May (Mohammad Talaei, Seif Shaheen. Centre for Preventive Neurology)




The strong association between lower adult lung function and higher cardiovascular mortality has not been adequately explained (and is not accounted for by smoking or age). Using data from the UK Biobank and the CARDIoGRAM consortium to investigate whether shared developmental signalling pathways (critical to lung development and repair) could partly explain the link, researchers analysed variants in 55 lung development genes associated with adult lung function, to see if these were also associated with coronary heart disease, blood pressure, pulse pressure, arterial stiffness index, and carotid intima-media thickness. Results show that the lung development pathways that influence adult lung function may also influence adult cardiovascular outcomes. This partly explains the link between lower adult lung function and higher cardiovascular risk. In 12 genes, the same variant was associated with a lung function trait and one or more cardiovascular traits, with variants in nine of these genes showing direction of effects that support the hypothesis. Authors say their findings could inform future research on druggable targets to optimise lung and cardiovascular development and repair.

BMJ Journals

Thorax

Respiratory epidemiology
Original research

Lung development genes, adult lung function and cardiovascular comorbidities 

 Laura Portas^{1, 2, 3},  Mohammad Talaei⁴,  Charlotte Dean⁵,  Nay Aung^{6, 7},  Matthew David Hind^{1, 8}, Alfred Pozarickij², Robin G Walters², China Kadoorie Biobank Collaborative Group, Peter GJ Burney¹, Steffen Petersen⁹, Cosetta Minelli¹, Seif O Shaheen⁴

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Many thanks to all who so enthusiastically contribute. Please send any news items for the next newsletter to j.a.mackie@qmul.ac.uk