

A welcome intervention

Since the launch of the applied research centre in Health and Lifestyle Interventions, investing in key academics who lead effective teams has been the major factor in our recent successes. Professor Louise Wallace explains how the new centre has made an impact with its research

When two research centres combined forces in 2006 to form the Health and Lifestyle Interventions (ARC HLI) applied research centre, it proved to be a successful venture.

The centre's purpose was to develop complex behavioural interventions for health, evaluate them and ensure they can be used in practice. Now in its third year the ARC HLI is providing high quality applied research, consultancy and postgraduate training – all underpinned by one of its core competences, health psychology.

Key appointments enabled the ARC HLI to get off to a great start and ensured we had serious academic leadership in place to tackle substantial research projects.

We were fortunate to secure the expertise of Dr David French, a skilled researcher and health psychologist, who now has three PhD students working with him and has already attracted a large Medical Research Council grant worth a third of a million pounds for a project called The development of an intervention to promote walking in primary care.

We have also appointed Professor Brian Toft (see interview on page 14), who is experienced in Patient Safety Investigations and he is now leading the development of the course on Root Cause Analysis in patient safety. This complements Department of Health funded research we had underway on learning from patient safety incidents and investigations; and evaluating staff training.

These as well as other new appointments and secondments are paying off. We have brought in over £1 million in both the first and second year and we now have 29 staff and students (nine of them are PhD students).

Practical use

We are keen to make sure our research is well used – we publish in high impact journals and we make our work known to policy makers. We also want to see our interventions being used practically to make a health impact. Some of

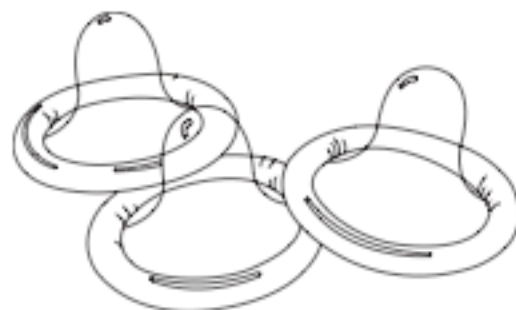
the projects we are currently leading the way in range from training health professionals in breastfeeding support to supporting local health and council services to promote breastfeeding, to undertaking evidence reviews to support the National Institute for Clinical and Health Excellence (NICE) guidance.

Our breastfeeding research has led us to create a commercially available learning package for health professionals to help them support more mothers to breastfeed their babies. A new training assessment called CUBA (Coventry University Breastfeeding Assessment) and a workbook with a DVD is available for sale through the centre's spin out company Health Behaviour Research Limited (www.healthbehaviourresearch.co.uk). A demo of the CUBA and a workbook sample can be downloaded from the site too.

This company was formed in 2006 to produce evidence-based intervention tools and make them available to a wide-range of people globally. The CUBA is already being used in the USA and Canada as well as in the UK.

A large pilot study is currently underway in the West Midlands, with funding from the West Midlands Regional Office, to help 900 healthcare staff across three healthcare economies to learn more about breastfeeding using the CUBA and the workbook.

We have also secured research grants from the NHS and from a global corporate to help develop Dr Katherine Brown's work on promoting contraception and reducing sexual



risk in young people. Dr Brown is leading the work on teenage pregnancy and recently presented her research findings at an international conference in Macau on contraception. We have developed a programme for Coventry Primary Care Trust called 'What Shall We Tell The Children About Relationships and Sex?' which offers advice to parents who have children aged five to 15. It is being delivered throughout Coventry and Warwickshire by facilitators and due to its success Coventry PCT is making it commercially available to other PCTs.

Supporting long-term illness

One of the largest projects we are working on at the moment is evaluating the Health Foundation's Co-creating Health project (www.health.org.uk/cch). The project, led by myself and Dr Andrew Turner with a team of six staff and a PhD student, operates in eight health care economies and four comparator health care economies involving 28 NHS trusts across England and Scotland. It tests the impact of interventions to support people with four common long term conditions: Chronic Musculo Skeletal Pain, Diabetes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Depression. ARC HLI is evaluating the Health Foundation's self-management course for patients, a clinical development programme for clinicians to train them to support their patients to self-manage, and a service improvement quality development to improve the

organisation and functioning of services to support self-management.

As a result of our prominent role in the evaluation of this high profile national demonstration project we have significant opportunities to develop new interventions. Much of our work is about transforming patients' engagement in their healthcare through support and by helping clinicians to use more effective communication strategies.

A project that demonstrates this type of work is the evaluation we are doing on an innovative approach to improving communication and decision-making between cancer patients and their clinicians in Edinburgh. We are also developing an intervention to improve Chlamydia screening by General Practitioners in Southern England.

It's not a lone crusade though. The centre has established strong links with many universities, and with Warwick Medical School in particular. In much of our work we partner with others in the University and CUE Limited.

The HLI has already worked on a Breastfeeding DVD with the Institute of Creative Enterprises (ICE) and is in collaboration with the Serious Games Institute (SGI) on the next phase of the parent programme. We're currently submitting a joint bid with the Business School around technology adoption, which will also call on the HDTI's expertise.

As we move into 2009, our aim is to expand our portfolio of collaborative projects with other universities and to find new ways to showcase and commercialise our interventions.



Key appointments

Funding has helped the ARC HLI appoint some key members to the team.

- Dr David French: recently undertaken advisory work for the Department of Health related to health psychology, as well as led the scientific committee of the largest European health psychology conference to date.
- Dr Jemma Edmunds, a postdoctoral fellow, is working alongside David, investigating exercise intervention for women who are pregnant and obese; a major health risk for mother and baby.
- Brian Toft: experienced in Patient Safety Investigations and developing a new course.
- Dr Louise Moody: part-time seconded from the Faculty of Art and Design to work with Brian Toft and Louise Wallace to research ergonomic approaches to patient safety.
- Dr Orla Dunn, senior lecturer in Psychology and Sue Law, senior lecturer in midwifery; both part-time secondments from Faculty of Health and Life Sciences to support breastfeeding intervention development.