

Health and Care Research Wales Faculty Showcase Speaker biographies

Dr Harry Ahmed, GP & Reader, Cardiff University



Harry is a Clinical Reader in Epidemiology at the Division of Population Medicine, and a GP at Rumney Primary Care Centre, Cardiff.

His research focuses on the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and wider impacts of common infections. He is particularly interested in how infection and antibiotic treatment affects people with specific long-term conditions (e.g., cardiovascular disease), or multimorbidity. Most of his research uses causal inference methods and large-scale routinely collected health data, but he also has experience of large multi-centre clinical trials.

Harry held back-to-back Fellowships from the NIHR [Doctoral, 2014-2019 and Advanced 2020-2023].

He co-leads the Infections work package for the Health and Care Research Wales funded Wales Centre for Primary and Emergency Care Research (PRIME Centre Wales).

He has considerable interest in supporting clinical academic trainees. He is the Director of the Academic Fellows Scheme, a Welsh Government funded scheme that recruits, supports and mentors GPs for two years and provides opportunities for research, teaching, and postgraduate study. He is also co-lead the Cardiff cohort of the WCAT programme

Professor Monica Busse, Director of Health and Care Research Wales Faculty, Professor Cardiff University



Monica was awarded her Bachelor of Science in Physiotherapy in 1993 from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. She worked clinically in South Africa, USA and UK 10 years whilst undertaking further studies in Ergonomics and Biomechanics. She was awarded her BSc Honours degree in Ergonomics and an MSc in Biomedical Sciences from the University of

Cape Town, South Africa in 1996 and 2001 respectively. In 2002, she registered for a full time PhD at the University of Wales College of Medicine in Cardiff and was awarded her PhD in 2005. Since then, she has worked as Lecturer, Senior lecturer, Reader and then Professor at Cardiff University. She completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Clinical Trials (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) in July 2017 as part of her Health and Care Research Wales/NIHR Post doctoral fellowship (2012-2016) and now works as a trials methodologist based in the Centre for Trials Research (CTR) at Cardiff University and is Director of the Health and Care Research Wales Faculty.

Her research seeks to enable people living with chronic health conditions to sustain an active lifestyle while staying connected and engaged in meaningful aspects of their lives with funding support of Health and Care Research Wales, NIHR and a range of charitable and European funders. She is also an accredited executive coach with an interest in developing teams and leaders working in research. She is a Health and Care Research Wales Senior Research Leader, has served on both Medical Research Council and National Institute of Health Research Funding panels, is a fellow of the Higher Education Academy and an elected fellow of the Learned Society of Wales, the national academy for Arts and Sciences in Wales.

Professor Amanda Daley, Professor of Behavioural Medicine and NIHR Research Professor in Public Health, Loughborough University



Amanda is a Professor of Behavioural Medicine and an NIHR Research Professor in Public Health. Amanda is Director of the Centre for Lifestyle Medicine and Behaviour (CLiMB) at Loughborough University. (<https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/climb/>). Amanda's work is focused on investigating the effects of lifestyle interventions on health outcomes. She has a particular interest in testing lifestyle interventions that can be delivered by health professionals within routine NHS consultations.

She is the chief investigator on several NIHR funded trials that are examining the effectiveness of primary care and community based physical activity and weight management interventions. Amanda has published more than 180 papers in health research and her work has featured in journals such as the BMJ and Lancet. Amanda is a panel member for the NIHR Advanced Fellowship Panel. She has a particular interest in supporting early career researchers, and in helping people become better health researchers. Beyond the world of health and science, Amanda is a keen runner and enjoys listening to music, as well as watching cricket and tennis

Dr Ceryl Davies, Social Care Economist, Bangor University



Dr Ceryl Davies works as a researcher at the Centre for Health Economics and Medicines Evaluation (CHEME) at Bangor University. Prior to this, she worked for over 20 years as a social worker, spending time in both Children and Adult Services, finalising her social care practice experience as a Senior Manager for Learning Disabilities Services. With a background in law and social work, she has a PhD in Social Policy.

Ceryl's research interests are focused on exploring issues that impact on young people, women's health and gender-based violence. In September 2024, she started a five-year Health and Care Research Wales/NIHR Advanced Fellowship focused on measuring the impact of enhancing cervical screening care for women living with the impact of sexual violence and abuse in Wales, England and Australia.

Dr Chloe George, Head of Blood Component Development & Research, Welsh Blood Service



Research.

Chole is a Consultant Clinical Scientist at the Welsh Blood Service (WBS), with over 24 years of experience in transfusion medicine. For most of her career, she has worked in operational scientific management of NHS laboratories, however in 2021, she received funding to establish a new research facility at WBS, marking the beginning of her research career and transition into the role of Head of Blood Component Development and

She started her research group with three members of staff and very limited lab space. They had shared interest and expertise in platelet transfusion research and used this as the initial focus of their work. Through attending conferences and seeking out collaborators they have greatly increased their scope and expanded to eight staff and fivefold the laboratory space.

Chloe's primary research focuses on the use of cold-stored platelets for major haemorrhage, with the potential to enable their use in pre-hospital settings and by the military. She has received the Trial Development Award from Health and Care

Research Wales, which she intends to use to provide mentoring and support to develop a clinical trial for cold stored platelets in the pre-hospital environment. Additionally, she has secured research grants from the European Blood Alliance and SMART Cymru, a Welsh Government innovation fund, in recent years

Career highlights include growing a reputation through publications, international presentations, and collaborations outside the NHS. However, research can be challenging, with occasional setbacks in results and the ongoing need to secure funding.

Dr Laura Hrastelj, Clinical and Research Lead Speech and Language Therapist, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board



Since qualifying as a Speech and Language Therapist in 2013, Laura has focused on clinical practice and research in children's communication impairments, particularly those who require Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems. Her work involves children with severe communication impairments, for example, those with cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and other developmental disorders.

Laura began her research career by publishing her MSc project on ingressive speech sound disorders in the *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*. She then pursued a PhD with the Vice-Chancellor's Studentship Award at Manchester Met, focusing on child-led interactions for children using hi-tech AAC systems.

Since completing her PhD in 2022, she has supported the development of Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) in paediatric and adult services. She led the development of research strategy for the Therapies Directorate in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, networking with AHPs and multidisciplinary clinicians. As R&D Lead, she mentors AHPs at various stages of their research careers. Recently, she secured funding from Health and Care Research Wales through the Advancing Researcher Award to further her PhD work and co-produce AAC interventions for children in special education settings.

Laura is passionate about supporting women in clinical academic careers. She faced many challenges in her research journey, such as working part-time while completing a full-time PhD and advocating for maternity support when it transpired that there was no maternity policy attached to the studentship. These experiences drive her to

offer mentorship and hope to other women in research who are navigating similar paths.

Professor Dyfrig Hughes, Professor of Pharmacoeconomics, Bangor University, Director of Research, North Wales Medical School



Dyfrig graduated in pharmacy at Cardiff University and completed registration to practise as a hospital pharmacist before leaving the NHS to undertake a Wellcome Trust funded PhD in cardiovascular pharmacology at the University of Liverpool. He was subsequently awarded a post-doctoral NHS Training Fellowship in Health Economics, which included an MSc at the University of York. Following academic positions at the University of Liverpool, he moved to Bangor University as Senior Research Fellow in 2004 and progressed to personal chair in pharmacoeconomics in 2010.

His research focuses primarily on pharmaceutical economics, policy and prescribing research. This encompasses the determination of the cost-effectiveness of medicines typically via trial-based economic evaluations, and research concerning medication adherence and pharmacogenetics. He also leads on methodological research to develop and enhance the way in which research is undertaken and reported. His applied research activity is funded principally by the NIHR HTA programme, whereas methodological research is funded by the MRC.

He has been recipient of a Health and Care Research Wales Senior Research Leadership award since 2016. Research highlights have centred around developing the evidence-base for pharmaceutical policies, informing decisions on the value of medicines and developing new methods for bridging quantitative pharmacology and health economic modelling. Dyfrig has also enjoyed supporting several NHS Wales groups, including being vice-Chair of the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group, and chair the National Pharmacogenomics Group. A lowlight –or perhaps a regret– was the lack of a pathway available to have continued clinical activity as a registered pharmacist.

Dr Julie Latchem-Hastings, Senior Lecturer, Cardiff University



Dr Julie Latchem-Hastings is a Senior Lecturer and Postdoctoral Fellow, funded by Health and Care Research Wales in the School of Healthcare Sciences. Her current study 'FEAST' explores the role food plays in the care experience of those living in long-term neurological care settings.

Julie's research and engagement focuses on under researched communities/populations - including people with a prolonged disorder of consciousness, younger adults (18-65) with neurological conditions living in long-term care and adults with hip dysplasia.

Work relating to people with neurological conditions features heavily in her research and as Deputy Director of the Coma and Disorders of Consciousness research centre www.cdcc.org.uk Julie has conducted a range of studies in the area of severe brain injury including exploring family and allied health care professional relations.

Julie enjoys working with creative artists and using creative methods to engage with patients and the public in her research. The use of creative methods has been central to her recent ISSF Public Engagement project 'Get CreActive' - aimed at supporting young adults with hips dysplasia to develop a peer support website about physical activity - see www.hipdysplasiainlife.org

Julie teaches a blended learning course about prolonged disorders of consciousness (PDoC), to support student and qualified allied health professional learning about this patient group and their communication with families.

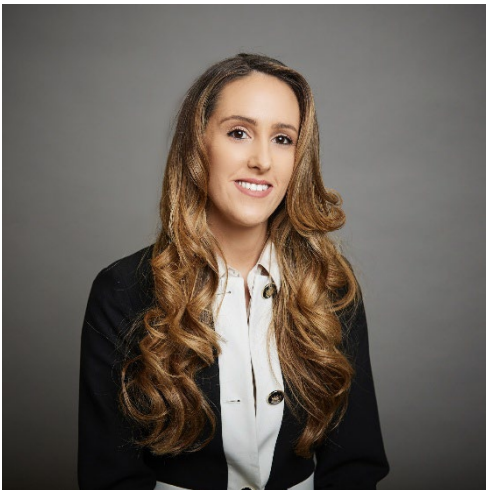
Professor G J Melendez-Torres, Associate Dean for Research Inclusion, NIHR Academy, Professor of Clinical and Social Epidemiology, Exeter University



GJ arrived at the University of Exeter in March 2019 to take up a personal chair in clinical and social epidemiology. His work spans health technology assessment (HTA), public health of child and adolescent social development (particularly as regards public mental health and health in schools), and intimate partner violence. He leads the School for Public Health Environments Research at Exeter (SPHERE), which is the University's membership in the NIHR School for Public Health Research; the

Exeter-Cardiff-Birmingham NIHR Public Health Review Team; and co-lead with Prof Jo Thompson Coon the NIHR-funded evidence synthesis group Isca Evidence. At national level, GJ is the Associate Director for Involvement and Engagement for the NIHR School for Public Health Research, and Associate Dean for Researcher Inclusion for the NIHR Academy. In April 2024, he was named an NIHR Senior Investigator.

Professor Rhiannon Owen, Professor of Statistics, Swansea University



Rhiannon is Professor of Statistics at Swansea University Medical School and Health and Care Research Wales-NIHR Advanced Fellow. Her main research interests include the development and application of Bayesian methods in Health Technology Assessment, Population Health and Health Service Evaluation. Her research interests include evidence synthesis methods, analysis of large scale linked electronic health records and simulation-based methods. This work has been supported by the Academy of Medical Sciences, Health Data Research UK, Health and Care Research Wales, the Medical Research Council, the National Institute for Health and Care Research and the Wellcome Trust.

Rhiannon is a member of the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Technology Appraisal Committee, member of the NICE Decision Support Unit, and Associate Member of the NICE Technical Support Unit. She has extensive experience of cross-sector collaboration including as a consultant, providing methodological and strategic advice to the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries.

Aisling Piggott, Senior Lecturer/Doctoral Researcher, Cardiff Metropolitan University



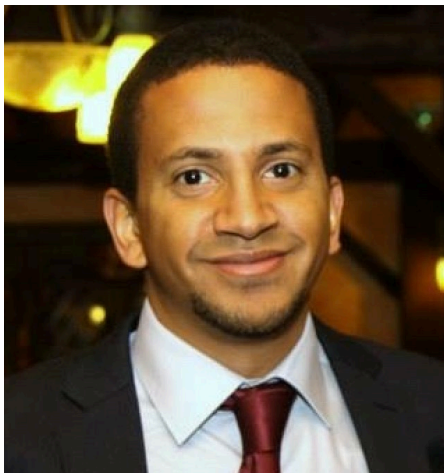
Aisling is a Specialist Dietitian, Senior Lecturer and Non-Executive Director of the British Dietetic Association. Early in her specialist role as Lead Paediatric Diabetes Dietitian, Aisling identified that many young people with diabetes were experiencing eating disorders, frequently presenting with raised glucose levels, severe restrictions or diabetic ketoacidosis rather than underweight or malnutrition.

Motivated by this observation, Aisling pursued research through an RCBC Wales 'First into

Research' grant, exploring clinicians' awareness of disordered eating in Type 1 Diabetes. Her early work sparked national discussions and contributed to the development of an All Wales Type 1 Diabetes and Disordered Eating (T1DE) network. Aisling has since secured several awards and funding, including an RCBC Wales PhD studentship 'Exploring understanding and prevention strategies for disordered eating in Paediatric Diabetes Care', (2022), CTMUHB SEED funding for resource development (2025), a travel grant to the British Society of Paediatric and Endocrine Diabetes (BSPED) (2024) and a scholarship to the International Society of Paediatric and Adolescent Diabetes (ISPAD) Science School in Abu Dhabi (2022).

Her research firmly focuses on preventing disordered eating in young people with Type 1 Diabetes, integrating qualitative methodologies, thematic analysis, and intervention science. Highlights of Aisling's research career included talking about the dangers of diet culture and T1DE on the TEDxNHS stage and chairing the Children and Young Peoples Diabetes Network (CYPDN) national screening guidelines group for disordered eating in paediatric diabetes care. Aisling has faced obstacles navigating the world of research as an Allied Health Professional following a path less travelled which has heightened her ever present imposter syndrome as a researcher.

Dr Leigh Sanyaolu, Health and Care Research Wales, Doctoral Fellow, Division of Population Medicine, Cardiff University



Leigh is a practising General Practitioner with 14 years of front-line NHS experience. His first involvement in clinical research was during his surgical training. This involved case reports and case series analyses with clinical colleagues from General Surgery, Ear Nose and Throat, and Burns and Plastics. These early opportunities reinforced his enthusiasm for research with the opportunity to learn new skills and improve patient care.

He began General Practice training in 2015, and it was his ambition to have an academic role alongside clinical practice. He successfully secured an Academic General Practice Registrar post giving him a 50:50 clinical academic split. During this role he undertook his first systematic review and a secondary analysis of a clinical trial. Following his General Practice training he secured an Academic General Practice Fellow post which was the platform for successfully securing a Health and Care Research Wales/NIHR Doctoral Fellowship starting in 2021.

The focus of Leigh's research is recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) and how shared decision-making between patients and healthcare professionals can be better supported.

The major highlights of his academic career so far include being awarded a prestigious Health and Care Research Wales/NIHR Doctoral Fellowship and being invited to be a co-applicant on a clinical trial to investigate second-line treatments for recurrent UTIs, which secured funding for over £2million. The lowlights of his research career so far include being an unsuccessful co-applicant on three UK-wide studies.

Dr Savita Shanbhag, GP Cancer Lead, Hywel Dda University Health Board



Savita Shanbhag works as GP Cancer Lead in Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDdUHB). Her role includes promoting early diagnosis in patients with cancer and improving communication between Primary and Secondary Care, at health board and national level. Savita has experience in leading and managing Research and Innovation projects in HDdUHB since 2018, that involve changes to cancer pathways. She has been a lead or co-investigator in various research and innovation projects. She actively represents Primary Care views on oncology pathways at health board and Wales-wide meetings, ensuring that these views are integrated into broader healthcare strategies. Her leadership and contributions have been recognized with accolades, including the Hywel's Applause Innovation Award in HDdUHB in 2022.

Her Emerging Researcher Award has aided collaboration and networking with research colleagues. She is working with academic teams in Wales and England on research projects to aid cancer screening and early diagnosis of bowel cancer. Savita has been successful as a co-PI with CRUK early detection and diagnosis primer award in 2025.

Dr Victoria Shepherd, Principal Research Fellow, Cardiff University



Vicky's background is in critical care nursing, where she developed a long-standing interest in decision-making for adults lacking capacity to consent. Following a move into a research post in the Centre for Trials Research, she found that there was an evidence gap about conducting research involving adults lacking capacity and the ethical and legal issues involved. After completing a master's in medical law and ethics she was awarded a Health and Care Research Wales/NIHR Doctoral Research Fellowship to explore these issues and develop the first intervention to support family members making proxy decisions about research.

Building on her doctoral fellowship, she has developed an interdisciplinary programme of research exploring and addressing the ethical, legal, and methodological challenges in research involving adults with impaired capacity to consent (CONSULT). This has included a trial to evaluate the decision aid, the development of a novel outcome measure (CONCORD), exploring national and international perspectives on advance research planning (CONSULT-ADVANCE), and the development of stakeholder-informed e-learning on trials involving adults lacking capacity (CONSULT Training). This work has been funded through a Health and Care Research Wales/NIHR Advanced Fellowship and additional funding from Wellcome, UKRI and a Churchill Fellowship. She is also concurrently embedding this inclusivity work in a range of clinical trials she is a co-investigator of. The highlight of her research career is supporting early career researchers and PhD students to develop their own research careers. Lowlights include the difficulties of having to forge an untraditional research path. Having recently been awarded an 8-year Wellcome fellowship Vicky is looking forward to developing this work further

Dr Phil Smith, Research Associate, Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE), Cardiff University



Phil completed his PhD at Cardiff University in 2019. Before moving to Cardiff, he spent five years managing a youth-led radio station as a qualified youth and community worker. Since 2019 Phil has worked in the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University.

His recent work includes two Health and Care Research Wales funded projects:

- 1) a fellowship about the post-16 transitions and destinations of care experienced young people who attend pupil referral units;
- 2) a social care project which explores the roles and practices of personal advisors who support young people with the leaving care process. This co-produced project is being carried out with peer-researchers with lived experience of the care system.

Phil co-chairs the Childhood and Youth Research Group at Cardiff University and sits on advisory panels for End Youth Homelessness Cymru and the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales School Exclusion project.

Felicity Waters, National Head of Communications, Engagement and Involvement, Health and Care Research Wales.



Felicity joined Health and Care Research Wales after 5 years as the Head of Communications at Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board and previously, Head of Press and Campaigns for ASH Wales.

A former journalist, Felicity trained with Trinity Mirror and later joined the Western Mail as Health Correspondent. She later worked for ITV Wales' factual department and BBC Wales's flagship current affairs series, Week in Week Out.

Felicity has also provided bespoke media, policy and public affairs services to organisations across the UK including the British Medical Association, Macmillan Cancer Support, Oxfam Cymru, Voices from Care and the Institute of Healthcare Management.

She is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the youth homelessness charity Llamau.