

NIHR 3 Schools Dementia PhD Studentship 2024 at University College London

NIHR 3 Schools Programme

The NIHR Research Schools for Primary Care (SPCR), Public Health (SPHR) and Social Care (SSCR) (“three Schools”) have joined together in a unique collaboration between leading academic centres in England to collaborate on a programme of work funded through the NIHR on dementia.

The Three Schools’ Dementia Research Programme aims to develop the evidence base for dementia-related practice in England by commissioning and conducting high-quality research. The Programme builds on research within each School and will carry out research to address key gaps in the evidence base working collaboratively across primary care, public health and social care.

The three Schools are committed to commissioning primary and secondary research across the spectrum of dementia-related practice, across different groups, settings and using a range of methodologies. Research could involve any aspect of prevention, diagnosis, treatment, support or care, and related health and social care services.

The opportunity

We have three exciting PhD studentships available at UCL. Details of each of the studentships are provided below.

The Programme’s Doctoral Studentships will support individuals with a stipend and fees for 3 years from October 2024. The students will join a cohort of 15 students within the NIHR Three Schools programme which are spread across multiple universities in England. As members of the Three Schools, students will have access to a range of training opportunities, including webinars, masterclasses and conferences.

Project 1

Managing delirium superimposed on dementia (DSD), in primary and social care

Supervisors: Dr Nathan Davies, Prof Liz Sampson, Prof Kate Walters, Prof Carol Brayne, Prof Martin Knapp, Prof Dan Davis

Delirium is an acute and fluctuating neuropsychiatric syndrome, affecting attention, consciousness and cognition. Delirium is a major public health issue, particularly in frail older people with dementia, increasing cognitive decline and worsens quality of life. Delirium occurring in someone with dementia is referred to as delirium superimposed on dementia (DSD). DSD is often unrecognised by healthcare professionals and caregivers. This PhD will investigate how DSD is detected and managed in the community. The studentship will consist of three mixed methods studies which the student will refine, but examples include a literature review, descriptive quantitative study, and mixed methods case studies.

Contact: Dr Nathan Davies – n.m.davies@ucl.ac.uk

Project 2

How can primary and social care providers best support distance caregivers of people with dementia?

Supervisors: Dr Sarah Griffiths, Dr Nathan Davies, Dr Mike Clark

Distant care givers (DCGs) of people with dementia provide unpaid care to a relative/friend, from whom, for example, they live at a geographic distance. DCGs can experience high levels of carer strain and wish

for better communication with primary and social care providers. The aim of this studentship is to develop guidance for a) primary and social care providers, enabling them to support DCGs of people with dementia, and b) DCGs, to support them in navigating their relationships with providers. Methods will include an evidence review, qualitative interviews and co-design workshops. The student will be supported by a supervisory team with a wealth of experience in primary and social care research, qualitative methods and co-design.

Contact: Dr Sarah Griffiths - s.a.griffiths@ucl.ac.uk

Project 3

Decision aid for Parkinson's Dementia (DECADE)

Supervisors: Prof Kate Walters, Dr Kumud Kantilal, Dr Nathan Davies

As dementia in people with Parkinson's progresses, decisions are often left for carers to make. However, carers find making decisions stressful and challenging. This project aims to understand the complexity and context of decision-making among carers of people with Parkinson's dementia and develop a prototype decision aid. Proposed methods include an evidence review, qualitative interviews with carers, focus groups/surveys with professions and stakeholder workshops to develop a prototype decision aid. The multi-professional supervisory team with expertise in primary care, social care, and public health will work with the student to develop their ideas and focus for the PhD.

Contact: Prof Kate Walters – k.walters@ucl.ac.uk

Department

The studentships would join a thriving group of 44 other PhD students in the **Research Department of Primary Care and Population Health** at UCL part of the Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care, headed by Prof Kate Walters and Prof Greta Rait. The students would be based in the Centre for Ageing Population Studies (CAPS) headed by Dr Nathan Davies. CAPS is an internationally renowned centre of excellence for dementia research. We are a multi-disciplinary group and can support research using quantitative (e.g. analysis of large datasets, clinical trials) and qualitative methodologies.

Our goals are to:

- Undertake excellent research that is clinically relevant and impacts on health and wellbeing;
- Provide excellent teaching in primary care, population health and research methods;
- Strengthen the discipline of primary care through leadership in research, teaching and clinical practice;
- Work in partnership with service users, practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders to increase the impact of our research, teaching and innovation on health and health care systems;
- Foster professional development to enable everyone to reach their full potential.

In order to do this, we:

- Encourage all phases of clinical research including epidemiology, qualitative work, intervention development and evaluation, implementation and translational research, as well as methodological innovation;
- Encourage multi-disciplinary working, bringing together clinicians and scientists with a wide range of methodological skills and epistemologies;
- Foster excellent communication within the Department, across workgroups and disciplines, and with local, national and international colleagues and organisations;
- Foster a learning environment where students, researchers, teachers and professional service staff are supported in learning and continuing professional development;
- Invest in the career development of all of our staff;

- Promote an open, friendly and inclusive working environment.

In the 2021 REF, UCL was top for research power in ‘medicine, health and life sciences’ and ‘social sciences’ and first in the Russell Group of Universities for Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care Research. PCPH has an excellent track record of supporting ECR. We have strong collaborations internationally, nationally and within UCL. In addition to being part of the Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care we have links with the UCL Institute of Healthcare Engineering (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/digital-health>), the Institute of Clinical Trials and Methodology (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ictm>), the Centre for Behaviour Change (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/behaviour-change>), to name but a few.

Website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology-health-care/research/pcph>

Training

At UCL we take the training of our research students very seriously and provide a rich and supportive training environment for them all. The UCL Doctoral Skills Development (DSDP) is designed to help doctoral students develop skills for research, professional development, and employment. Students also take advantage of UCL’s Research Staff Development Programme (RSDP), which offers a complementary set of advanced training workshops and courses. The students are expected to spend the equivalent of 10 days every year on skills improvement and they should accrue 60 training points by the end of their degrees. This training is tracked in their electronic Logs and by their Thesis Committees. There will be additional training opportunities through the department and institute as well as more broadly within the NIHR Three Schools Programme.

About you

We invite applications from individuals who have **2:1 or above** for their degree (or equivalent) and relevant master’s degree or equivalent post-graduate research experience and training.

Skills, knowledge, attributes and experience:

- Experience of working in a research team
- Experience of writing up research for example for publication or a thesis
- Ability to work under pressure, to meet tight deadlines, and proven problem-solving skills
- Ability to work both independently and collaboratively as part of a team
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Willing to work collaboratively in multi-disciplinary and multi-professional teams
- A research interest in ageing, dementia or long-term conditions would be desirable

How to apply

Please send a **CV and covering letter** highlighting your skills and experience to study for a PhD and reasons for why you would like to study a PhD. **Please rank in order of preference the PhD topics** and explain why you would like to study these.

Interviews will be held in the morning of 9th April in person at the Royal Free Hospital, Hampstead, London.

Please send your applications by 5pm 21st March 2024 to Alice Pritchard: alice.pritchard@ucl.ac.uk