Meet Emma Wallace, winner of this year’s Yvonne Carter Award for Outstanding New Researcher

Each year the RCGP and the Society for Academic Primary Care (SAPC) award the Yvonne Carter Award for Outstanding New Researcher, and each year the competition gets harder. This year panel members from the RCGP Scientific Foundation Board (SFB) and SAPC reviewed several high-quality applications from early career researchers.

Dr Emma Wallace, a GP in North Dublin and Senior Lecturer in General Practice at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, impressed the panel members with her work. Her research interests relate to characterising older people at higher risk of experiencing poorer health outcomes. She is particularly interested in using observational epidemiology and systematic reviews to examine risk prediction, safe prescribing and multimorbidity. Here Emma outlines his plans for the award and talks about her career journey.

What is your main area of interest, and how did that develop?

Caring for older people with multimorbidity and polypharmacy is one of the greatest challenges faced by health systems internationally. In my clinical practice, I see first-hand how challenging balancing the risks and benefits of medications can be, especially for older people with multimorbidity. My research aims to characterise older people most at risk of experiencing poorer health outcomes. I am particularly interested in optimising prescribing for people with multimorbidity and the use of risk prediction models in predicting health outcomes.

What does your research involve?

I work as a Senior Lecturer in General Practice at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in Dublin and at the national centre for primary care research in Ireland - the HRB Centre for Primary Care Research. Our research centre aims to establish standards for the quality of care of vulnerable patient groups, including older adults, with a particular emphasis on effective medicines monitoring. My research involves examining measures of potentially inappropriate prescribing and multimorbidity, primarily through observational epidemiology and systematic reviews, and using risk prediction models to identify older people at higher risk of experiencing poor health outcomes.
What will the RCGP / SAPC Yvonne Carter Award enable you to do?

I currently Chair the Quality and Safety in Practice committee of the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP). The ICGP is the professional body for general practice in Ireland and this committee oversees the publication of evidence-based guides for GPs. This award will enable me to conduct a mapping exercise to identify and map evidence-based guides published by relevant international organisations for use by GPs in clinical practice. The aim is to acquire a broadly representative sample and to ensure that the ICGP approach broadly reflects international best practice. I will use the remaining bursary to fund my visit on behalf of the ICGP to the Dutch College of General Practitioners in Utrecht.

Based on your experience, what advice do you have for people who are interested in working in the research field?

Based on my own experience I’d suggest;

1) Work with people who inspire and challenge you. I’m very lucky to work with a fantastic group of interdisciplinary researchers who share my research vision. Surround yourself with people you continue to learn from.

2) Find a role model and be one for others. Find someone whose career you would like to emulate and see if they can mentor you. Remember you are also a role model for others coming after you so get involved with mentorship early in your career.

3) Say yes as often as possible. My experience has been that saying yes often early in my career has led to great opportunities, often unexpectedly. It’s clearly important to balance this with other work and life commitments and to keep your workload manageable.