Meet Nathan Davies, 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 Nathan Davies, a Research Fellow at UCL, impressed all the panel members with the number of grants he has secured and projects he has collaborated on in the three years since completing his PhD. Here Nathan outlines his plans for the award, and talks about his career journey.

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

My research currently focuses on end of life care for people with dementia and how we can improve the experience of care not only for patients, but also for families and others affected by dementia. I have a particular interest in making decisions at the end of life and supporting practitioners to make decisions with patients and their families; we know this is an area that practitioners find challenging and I hope that my research will support GPs with this.

My background is in Psychology. I worked in memory clinics and I noticed a pattern whereby we would see patients with mild to moderate stages of dementia, but they then fell off our radar. This got me thinking about what was happening in the wider context. There was also little support for those with later stages of dementia, which surprised me. Through my early work, I realised that most guidelines and research for example was very practitioner oriented with little input from family carers, who we know provide most support day to day and are experts through experience.

What does your research involve?

My PhD was a large piece of qualitative research; I carried out in depth interviews with 47 family carers. I wanted to find out what their experience of end of life care was, what do they see and what are their experiences? I realised that their priorities aren’t always the medical but usually centre around the psychosocial importance of end of life care – being treated with respect and dignity.

My post-doctoral work has focused on two areas: 1) supporting practitioners make decision through the development of rules-of-thumb. These have been implemented in NHS sites and the Alzheimer’s
Society have incorporated them into their end of life training programme; 2) supporting family carers at home with the development of an online support tool.

**How will you use this award?**

This award will allow me to expand my networks with lower income countries, and I’m specifically interested in working with Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has an increasing ageing population with the highest proportion of older adults in South Asia. This award will allow me to travel to Sri Lanka to carry out workshops with GPs and the Ministry of Health to provide education, awareness and an understanding of dementia and how they can support family carers. I will also hold workshops with family carers to not only provide them with support, but also to learn more about their approach to caring for people with dementia.

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

You can’t underestimate the importance of networking in research. This means ensuring you are talking to people that do similar work, but also networking with those who have different research interests not necessarily in a directly related field. There is so much we can learn from each other.

Academia is changing and social media is becoming a huge part of what it means to be involved with research. I use Twitter to keep up to date with new research and key topics in the field of healthcare, but also to talk about the work that I’m doing. It’s also useful to blog about new research or publications to disseminate findings. You can’t rely on people reading academic papers anymore!

Make sure to get involved in lots of different events and networks across not just your research group or department, but also the wider institute and organisations such as the SAPC or RCGP.

Lastly, I would say to not be afraid to keep trying when you’re not successful – whether it’s a grant application or an unsuccessful publication, don’t get disheartened and go for it again!