Meet GP Kamal Mahtani, winner of this years Yvonne Carter Award for outstanding new researcher

Innovative academic GP Kamal Mahtani, winner of this years Yvonne Carter Award for outstanding new researcher, impressed the award panel. The panel, consisting of members of the RCGP Scientific Foundation Board and members of the Society for Academic Primary Care (SAPC), were pleased to see that applicants represented a wide range of disciplines that will impact and ultimately improve general practice, primary care and patient outcomes.

Dr Joanne Reeve, Chair of the SAPC, said of Kamal ‘This year's award produced another strong field of candidates. The panel would like to congratulate all who applied - the decision process was harder than ever. The future is certainly bright for Academic Primary Care. We were delighted to present the award to Kamal. Having recently qualified in General Practice, Kamal is already showing leadership and impact in the academic discipline. The panel were particularly impressed with his plans for the Award - to support further development of an international network of primary care academics’

Kamal outlines his plans for the award and top tips for new GP researchers.

What does your research involve?
I am the deputy director of the centre for evidence based medicine (CEBM), based in the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences. At the CEBM we are dedicated to the practice, teaching and dissemination of high quality evidence based medicine to improve healthcare in everyday clinical practice. My main research interests lie in evidence synthesis and how we implement evidence to inform decisions with individual patients, populations or at a policy level. I am the lead author of a number of Cochrane systematic reviews and most recently have completed a body of work on improving the evidence base for patients needing anticoagulation.

How will you be using the award?
Recently the RCGP launched the “Bright Ideas” campaign to encourage GPs to “take up practices which have been successful elsewhere and encourage them to try new ideas themselves”. My proposal is to explore whether the Bright Ideas concept could be extended to an International forum of primary care researches. Principally, I will seek to gain information on how genuine improvements in primary care have been successfully implemented in other healthcare systems and how these might be translated to the UK system.

What is it like to be an academic GP?
Honestly, I feel privileged to be an academic GP. While it can be challenging to juggle working in a busy GP practice with being a researcher and teacher (and have a family), I genuinely could not imagine doing anything else. The patient contact is so important as an academic GP.
You get a better sense of the needs of patients or services in the community. You then have the opportunity to explore how this need could be turned into a research question, which may ultimately provide an answer that fills that need. There is therefore a real feeling of being able to make a difference not just for my patients, but other patients too. The dual roles of an academic GP complement each other well.

**What triggered your interest in the field of how United Kingdom general practice can learn from other primary care systems?**

General practice is under considerable pressure with declining resources, an ageing population, multi-morbidity and rising demands, it is no surprise that there is an unsustainable workload. Despite these pressures, the principles of UK general practice should be highly valued. Few healthcare systems in the world can provide the high quality generalist care to patients in a community setting that general practice does.

Therefore there is a need to develop strategies that can reduce the workload on general practice whilst delivering the highest quality patient care. To that end, there is no reason why we should not explore the potential of learning from other primary care systems, while retaining the core principles of our own system.

**Based on your current work, what advice do you have for GPs in the UK who are planning to undertake primary care research, any top tips?**

OK, here are 5 tips in no specific order

1. Don’t do research for the sake of just doing research. Ask questions that are genuinely relevant to clinical practice and whose answers are likely to make a difference to the care of patients. There is already a lot of wasted research, don’t add to that.

2. Don’t work on your own. When you are starting out as a researcher, there is so much to learn from others. Fellow academic GPs, health services researchers, statisticians, epidemiologists, patients, and many more. Don’t be afraid to get guidance or better still collaborate with people and networks of researchers. It can be such a rich experience and as you get more experienced, those same people may ask you to collaborate with them.

3. The final outputs from your research should be more than a publication. Think about other ways of disseminating your work once it has been completed e.g. at conferences, direct engagement with stakeholders, social media, blogging, media work, teaching, public engagement and more. Although a citation in a good journal is something to be proud of, the impact of your work can extend far beyond this.

4. Don’t give up your clinical work. As you become a more senior researcher, there can be increased pressure to do more as an academic, sometimes at the expense of your clinical work. But we trained first and foremost as GPs and being a clinician brings its own skill set and experiences, which can compliment the work as an academic.

5. Have fun. Being a clinical academic is a privilege as you have the opportunity to turn questions and theories into answers, which have the potential to improve patient care. If you can’t enjoy having that privilege, then research is probably not for you.