

Research Newsletter



WELLBEING
OF WOMEN

Partnerships

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Wellbeing of Women and Wellcome Trust

Each year Wellbeing of Women awards Research Training Fellowships to outstanding candidates eager to pursue a career in academic obstetrics and gynaecology. This year we are very pleased to be able to announce our first ever joint fellowship with the prestigious Wellcome Trust.

Wellbeing of Women entered into partnership with the Wellcome Trust in recognition of the fact that there is much less support of obstetrics and gynaecology than many other specialities. Under the terms of the partnership, candidates that meet the standards of funding in our peer review and interview process can be nominated for interview by Wellcome.

In an outstanding outcome for Wellbeing of Women, both of the candidates we put forward to Wellcome were chosen for funding. This is a strong validation of our standards and achievements in attracting world-class candidates. Indeed, one of these candidates was subsequently awarded a Fellowship by the Medical Research Council.

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This means that we have the first ever Wellbeing of Women/Wellcome Trust Research Fellow. Dr Catherine James of UCL is an outstanding candidate who will be examining how infection and the body's immune response interact in women who are at high risk of delivering their baby early.

Previous research has shown that the immune system and infections in general are important in preterm birth, and this project will look at certain molecules within the immune system in more detail. These proteins are present in the cervix and have antimicrobial properties; Dr James believes that women who deliver preterm may have either less of these proteins or less active proteins. The final stage of the project is to use gene therapy to increase the amount of these proteins produced by the cells of the cervix with a view to reducing the risk of preterm birth.

The Research Training Fellowship will allow Dr James to work on this project full time for three years, recruiting patients and collecting samples in a specialised research antenatal clinic at UCLH. The laboratory work will take place at UCL Institute of Women's Health and Institute of Child Health.



"I couldn't quite believe it when I found out that I had been awarded the Fellowship, and now that the good news has settled in I am really looking forward to starting my research!"

Dr Catherine James

Wellbeing of Women/Royal College of Midwives Entry-Level Scholarship



The Royal College of
Midwives

Each year Wellbeing of Women awards Entry-Level Research Scholarships to enable trainees/professionals with little research experience to be exposed to a research environment. In previous years these Scholarships have been restricted to medical graduates with an interest in obstetrics and gynaecology. For the most recent round, however, we entered into partnership with the prestigious Royal College of Midwives (RCM) in order to encourage midwifery candidates to develop research interests.

Gail Johnson, Education and Professional Development Advisor at RCM, stated:

“The RCM is pleased to be working in collaboration with Wellbeing of Women, to support midwives who are new to research to develop their research skills.”

We are thrilled that this partnership has resulted in the first successful award of a Wellbeing of Women/Royal College of Midwives Entry-Level Scholarship. The successful candidate is Mrs Josephine Holleran, a midwife at Lancashire Women and Newborn Centre who will be undertaking a project called:

Does the use of computers in birthing rooms affect the care that women receive during childbirth?

This was a candidate and project which both the Wellbeing of Women Research Advisory Committee and



“When I found out that I had been awarded this grant I was excited about the opportunity to carry out research into a subject that I feel is very important for both staff and women. The grant will cover my wage for 2 days a week for 12 months to allow me to complete the study. During this time I will be able to develop both personally and professionally and improve my skills and knowledge. The study will aim to provide evidence which will improve the care that women receive whilst improving the working lives of midwives.”

Mrs Josephine Holleran, Midwife

the RCM believed to be outstanding. Josephine tells us a little about her project below:
“Computers are increasingly being introduced into birth rooms within hospital settings. They can have many benefits including better access to information and easier data collection. However some women and staff have reported that the use of computers can impact on the midwives’ ability to communicate effectively with women and provide adequate support during labour.

This study will look at

the impact of computers on communication between women, their birth partner, and the midwife and whether the time spent inputting data affects the time spent supporting the women. This will be done by spending time in the delivery room observing midwives caring for women. Interviews will also be carried out with both doctors and midwives to find out how they feel about the use of computers in their work and whether they are useful”.

We are pleased to report that we will be collaborating with the RCM again for the 2012 Entry-Level Scholarship round, which will be awarded in January 2012.

AMRC Peer Review Audit 2011

In order to ensure that the research we fund is of the highest standard, every application we receive is subjected to a rigorous review by experts in the relevant fields. This is called peer review.

It is a condition of membership of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) that a charity has a peer review process which demonstrates best practice in several areas (taken from AMRC Principles of Peer Review):



- Accountability: Charities should publish details of their procedures for the evaluation of research, including the names of those on their scientific advisory committees, panels or other if appropriate;

- **Balance:** Review panels should reflect a fair balance of experience and scientific disciplines;
- **Independent Decision-Makers:** The charity's own administrative staff should not be responsible for deciding the scientific quality of the research;
- **Rotation of Scientific Advisers:** Scientific advisers serving on review panels should be replaced at regular intervals
- **Impartiality:** The review panel should include a significant number of advisors with no interest in the applications under discussion, and advisors with an interest should not be present when decisions are made.

In order to ensure this, the AMRC audits their members' peer review processes every five years. We are pleased to confirm that Wellbeing of Women passed the AMRC Peer Review Audit 2011 and received a Certificate of Best Practice. We endeavour to fund only the best research in order to ensure value for money and we are thrilled that the AMRC has once again recognised the high quality of our review process which ensures this.

Betty Austin Memorial Entry-Level Scholarship

Optimisation of cryopreservation for ovarian tissue prior to autologous transplantation

Dr. Tom Morewood, Royal Free Hospital London

This year one of our Entry-Level Scholarships was enabled by a generous legacy from Betty Austin, who sadly passed away this year. Betty was a long-term volunteer for the Great Yarmouth branch of Wellbeing of Women and was very passionate about training the next generation of researchers, ensuring that the expertise necessary to continue improving women's health is secured.

We thought it appropriate to award this Scholarship to an outstanding candidate in London, Dr Tom Morewood. He described his project below:

Imagine being diagnosed with cancer, and then imagine that your doctor tells you that although treatment is possible and will probably save your life, it will most likely prevent you from ever having children. This is the reality faced by thousands of women diagnosed with cancer and other conditions requiring chemo- and radiotherapy every year.

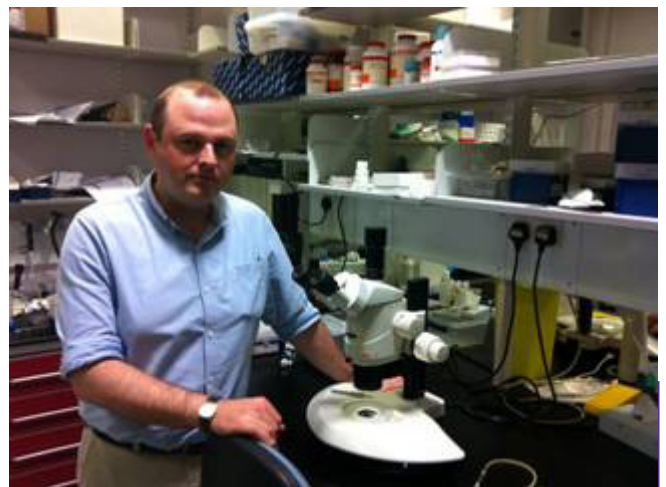
Currently, the only realistic option

for these women to conceive, is to have a cycle of IVF to create embryos before they start their cancer treatment. These embryos can then be frozen and stored ready to be implanted after the cancer has been treated, when the woman wants to have a family. However for this to occur, women have to have a partner or be happy to use donated sperm, and also have to delay their treatment for a few weeks. These can be daunting choices to be presented with at a time that is already worrying and stressful.

New experimental techniques are emerging which allow pieces of the ovary to be taken in a small operation, frozen and stored during cancer treatment, and then re-implanted after successful therapy in order that the woman can conceive once healthy. However, there are still many problems with this technique and many questions remain unanswered.

My research is trying to find answers to these questions. I am looking at different ways of freezing and thawing parts of the ovary, and trying to find a method which minimises the damage that occurs to the tissue during the process. Furthermore, I am investigating whether the previously frozen tissue produces good quality eggs, and if the freezing and thawing process causes any damage to the cells

which then go on to develop into eggs. This research would not be possible without the generous funding from Wellbeing of Women. I was awarded the Betty Austin Memorial Scholarship in May 2011 and it was wonderful news. I had to put in a lot of groundwork to try and get the research approved and trying to convince everyone that it was a good idea sometimes took a great deal of effort!



“When I was awarded the scholarship I felt that all my hard work had been worthwhile, and that Wellbeing had recognised the value of the research I had proposed. I am very grateful to the Great Yarmouth branch of Wellbeing of Women for awarding me the Betty Austin Memorial Scholarship, and I hope that my research will improve the outlook for young women diagnosed with cancer in the future”.

Dr. Tom Morewood

Trusts and Foundations

Trusts and Foundations are making a major contribution to Wellbeing of Women's work. Together we are funding some incredible, innovative and exciting research which will help to improve the health of women and their babies today and in the future.



THE FREEMASONS' GRAND CHARITY

The Freemasons' Grand Charity have recently awarded a very generous grant towards Dr Orsi's womb cancer project in Leeds which aims to provide much-needed new information on this under-researched disease.

"Wellbeing of Women is a fantastic organisation, driven by the objective of improving women's health. The funding of medical research is central to our grant-making policy and an important cause within the Masonic community, and we are therefore delighted to support the Charity with this grant."

Laura Chapman, Chief Executive of The Freemasons' Grand Charity.

While womb cancer largely affects older women, the number of women developing the disease in the UK has doubled over the past decade. We are very pleased to report that Dr Orsi and his team are making excellent progress and have had enormous success in recruiting women patients at St James's University Hospital Leeds to participate in the study.

We have had wonderful support for this project from **The Dowager Countess Eleanor Peel Trust** and **The Austin & Hope Pilkington Trust**, who are keen to support medical research which will benefit older people. Yorkshire Trusts have also been generous with their donations and include the **Arnold Burton 1998 Charitable Trust; The Charles & Elsie Sykes Trust; The Linden Charitable Trust; The Constance Green Foundation; The Patricia and Donald Shepherd Charitable Trust and The Molly Croysdale Charitable Trust.**

ASDA FOUNDATION 'Supporting Your Local Community'

We are delighted to announce that the **Asda Foundation** is now also backing the project: Asda employees and Freemasons around the country have all raised funds to make a difference and recognise the importance of finding new and better treatments for womb cancer.

Increasing research to save the lives of babies is one of our priorities.

THE GARFIELD WESTON FOUNDATION shares our objective and is funding our research project at Oxford University, where our researchers are investigating the role of the mother's immune system in early pregnancy loss and pre-eclampsia. We hope that this research will lead to the use of a simple blood test in the near future to predict which women are at risk so that doctors can intervene to save the baby.

THE WELTON FOUNDATION has made a fantastic commitment over 3 years to our pioneering research at University College London to prevent brain damage in newborn babies. This internationally acclaimed research group are making breakthroughs in saving babies' lives and helping to reduce the number of children living with severe physical and mental disabilities. **The Sir Samuel Scott of Yews Trust** has also made a significant contribution to this research.



Finding funding for research into urinary incontinence is not easy, yet conditions like this can have a huge impact on a woman's quality of life. We are therefore very grateful to **The Rosetrees Trust** for enabling us to take forward our RELAX clinical trial which is testing the safety and effectiveness of Botox as a treatment for Overactive Bladder disease.

Once again we would like to warmly thank all our supporters who help us to fund vital medical research for the benefit of all women and their families.