

# PhD Studentship

Title: An Exploration and Evaluation of the Practice of Social Prescribing (SP) in a Rural Area

Closing date: Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Interview date: Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## Supervisory Team:

Dr Peter Unwin (Director of Studies)

Prof Nick Evans

Dr Frances Howie

## The Project:

### Context

This is an exciting opportunity for a PhD student to explore a fast-moving area of practice within a local NHS system and a real chance to contribute to a national evidence gap, as well as to influence the development of local delivery. Social Prescribing (SP) has been variably defined and implemented over time and across the country but has had a relatively weak evidence base compared with other areas of NHS intervention. This lack of evidence is of particular note at a time when government policy has prioritised its implementation as part of the 10 Year Plan for the NHS (NHS, 2018). The planned research, which is designed to bring together insights from across the social sciences, including areas of sociology, health and geography, will enable an in-depth understanding of the practice and impact of SP within Worcestershire and will focus on a rural area within this county. SP relies on a network of voluntary and community sector organisations to which prescribers can refer, and the nature / strength of these in smaller rural settlements is contested. The successful student will have the opportunity to work with local professionals from the NHS and the County Council Public Health team and will build a good understanding of the application of research in practice. Members of the University Supervisory Team have expertise in geography, social science, and public health, and one has held a leadership role in the development of SP locally. Applicants should hold a Master's level qualification in a relevant social science or health profession.

### The Practice of Social Prescribing (SP) in a Rural Area

This is an important and exciting moment for the better understanding of the practice and impact of social prescribing within a rural context. Rural areas present a particular problem for the delivery of many services, including health. This is by virtue of the influence of space, particularly the dispersed nature of health needs. There is a well-established literature on rural deprivation and how to measure its health consequences (Woodward, 1996; Martin et al., 2000; Burke and Jones, 2019), but work is still very much lacking on intervention and its effectiveness. A range of

initiatives are in place nationally with a growing awareness of the potential of non-medical interventions to improve the lives of people who are frequent users of health services, government having adopted the principles of social prescribing (NHS 2018; 2019) but, in the absence of much in the way of 'top-down' instruction from national bodies, social prescribing has emerged organically 'from the bottom up'" (Polley et al., 2017). Until now, there has been a linked paucity of robust evidence as to impact although there have been cautious grounds for optimism, with a consensus that stronger evidence is needed (Brandling, 2009). It appears clear from a qualitative perspective that patients and medical professionals speak positively about SP interventions, yet the evidence on cost and outcome remains undeveloped (Grant, 2000; Bickerdike et al., 2016.)

There is thus an urgent need for research which can consider the conceptualisation, practice and impact of social prescribing. Worcestershire was an early adopter of social prescribing in general practice, with co-funded pilots using the local authority Public Health Ring-fenced Grant and NHS general practice innovation money. Further pilot work is currently planned in secondary care, using development income from Health Education England. At the same time, new funding is being released from NHS England to systematise and increase the use of social prescribing nationally. This creates an exciting opportunity to conduct a mixed methods study, with the potential to develop and evaluate SP as a tool to benefit the health of residents in rural areas. Theories of governance relating to the top-down or bottom up delivery of health services might also be explored. Existing datasets will be available for interrogation and there is also the potential to develop new data in this area using qualitative approaches with practitioners and patients. This studentship will build new knowledge and understanding of the impact of social prescribing in practice, at a time when it has been given a place at the heart of the new NHS.

#### Further Reading:

Bickerdike, L., Booth, A., Wilson, P.M. et al. (2016) Social Prescribing: less rhetoric and more reality: a systematic review of the evidence, *BMJ Open* 2017;7: e013384. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-013384

Brandling, J.& Wiliam, H. (2009) Social prescribing in general practice: adding meaning to medicine. *Br J Gen Pract*, 59 (563): 454–456.  
<https://bjgp.org/content/59/563/454>.

Burke, A., & Jones, A. (2019). The development of an index of rural deprivation: a case study of Norfolk, England. *Social Science & Medicine*, 227, 93-103.

Dayson, C. & Bashir, N. (2014) *The social and economic impact of the Rotherham Social Prescribing Pilot*, Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research.  
<https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/social-economic-impact-rotherham.pdf>

Grant, C., Goodenough, T., Harvey, I. & Hine, C. (2000) A randomised controlled trial and economic evaluation of a referrals facilitator between primary care and the voluntary sector. *BMJ* 320(7232):419–423.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/320/7232/419>

Kimberlee, R. (2016) What is the value of social prescribing? *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 3 (3). pp. 29-35. ISSN 2055-0286

<http://scholarpublishing.org/index.php/ASSRJ/article/view/1889>

King's Fund (2017) *What is social prescribing?* <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing/>

Marmot, M. (2014) *Fair society, healthy lives: the Marmot Review: strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010.* (2010) ISBN 9780956487001.

<https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review-strategic-review-of-health-inequalities-in-england-post-2010>

Martin, D., Brigham, P., Roderick, P., Barnett, S., & Diamond, I. (2000). The (mis) representation of rural deprivation. *Environment and Planning A*, 32(4), 735-751.

NHS (2014) *The Five Year Forward View* <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/5yfv-web.pdf> =

NHS (2018) NHS Long Term Plan. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nhs-long-term-plan-version-1.2.pdf>

NHS (2019) *Social prescribing and community-based support.*

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/social-prescribing-community-based-support-summary-guide.pdf>

O'Mara-Eves, A., Brunton, G., McDaid, D., Oliver, S. et al. (2013) *Community engagement to reduce inequalities in health: A systematic review, meta-analysis and economic analysis.* doi.10.3310/phr01040 *Public Health Research*, Vol 1, No 4.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK262817/>.

Public Health England (2015) *A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing.* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-wellbeing-a-guide-to-community-centred-approaches>

Polley, M. Bertotti, M., Kimberlee, R. et al (2017) *A Review of the evidence Assessing Impact of Social Prescribing on Healthcare Demand and Cost Implications*, University of Westminster.

<https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/e18716e6c96cc93153baa8e757f8feb602fe99539fa281433535f89af85fb550/297582/review-of-evidence-assessing-impact-of-social-prescribing.pdf>

Woodward, R. (1996). 'Deprivation 'and 'the rural': an investigation into contradictory discourses. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 12(1), 55-67.

### **Qualifications needed**

#### **Essential:**

Applicants should have or be able to evidence:

- Education to Masters Degree level in a relevant area.
- A First or Upper Second (2.1) Honours Degree
- A sound understanding of, and interest in social prescribing
- Experience of relevant research methods and skills;
- Ability to contribute to research study design;
- Computer literacy;
- Proficiency in oral and written English;
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines;
- Good interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work independently and contribute to a team;
- Commitment and an enthusiastic approach to completing a higher research degree;

#### **Desirable:**

- Existing connections/links with appropriate communities/groups
- Full UK Driving Licence

### **Details of the studentship**

During the period of your studentship you will receive the following:

- a tax free bursary of £15,009 for a period of 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years
- a budget to support your project costs for the first 3 years of the project
- a laptop
- use of the Research Student Study Space in Research School

You will be expected to play an active role in the life of both the Research School and of the School. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in learning and teaching within the School under the guidance of your Director of Studies.

### **Application Process:**

To begin the application process for this studentship please go to our webpage [www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships](http://www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships) and click apply now next to the project you wish to apply for.

### **The Interview**

The interview will provisionally be held on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020. All successful, shortlisted applicants will be interviewed. The interview process normally lasts around one and a half hours in total and includes a meeting with the project supervisors, and an opportunity to view the campus and the Research School.

In advance of interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit:

- A sample of written academic work.

### **Research at the University of Worcester:**

Research at the University of Worcester has grown significantly over the last 10 years. This growth is reflected in the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014). Worcester was the most improved University in the UK based on Research Fortnight's "Research Power" measure, reflecting a more than four-fold increase in the number of staff submitted compared to RAE 2008 and a commensurate increase in the quality of the research. The University will submit 50% more staff to REF 2021 than in 2014 and is expecting significant further improvements in its outcomes. It is also reflected in the increase in Research & Knowledge Exchange funding over this period. The University has been successful in winning funding from a wide range of major funders: Research Councils such as AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC and NERC; major charities such as the Leverhulme Trust, the Alzheimer's Society and the British Academy; health-research funders such as the NIHR, the Department of Health and local NHS Trusts; European funding through Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+; and funding from local, national and global businesses.

The University is focused on research which addresses real world challenges and provides solutions to these challenges:

- **Human Health and Wellbeing** with research groups looking, for example, at mood disorders, dementia care, biomedical research, and violence prevention
- **Sustainable Futures** with research groups looking, for example, at crop protection, eco-system services, aerobiology and sustainability education
- **Professional Education** with research groups looking, for example, at the social psychology of education and the philosophy and ethics of professional practice)
- **Identity and Inclusion** with research groups looking, for example, at social justice, inclusive approaches to sport, religion & society, and Early Modern culture & society

The University continues to provide a robust infrastructure for research. It has a well-established Research School which houses its growing research student body and which provides a comprehensive programme of researcher development for staff and students. It established a Research Office in 2013, responsible for research funding, governance and strategy. The University is committed to further developing its research profile, through a strategic approach to its support for and investment in research. Its fully-funded studentships are part of this investment.



## Research School

The Research School is a focal point for all our research students. It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

## School of Allied Health and Community

Allied Health and Community at Worcester encompasses subject areas including Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Paramedic Science, Advancing Clinical Practice, Health and Social Care, Mental Health, Nutritional Therapy, Public Health, Palliative Care, Physician Associate training, Social Work and Youth and Community Studies.

We pride ourselves on our teaching excellence, applied research and practice development. We work closely with our local community and with partners across a wide range of sectors to enhance the student experience and to provide students with an invaluable insight into professional practice.

The School supports two internationally acclaimed Research Centres, the Association of Dementia Studies (ADS) and Centre for Violence Prevention (CVP). We also house a specialist health and wellbeing facility, the McClelland Centre.

The School houses three internationally renowned research centres:

- Association for Dementia Studies
- Centre for Violence Prevention
- Mood Disorders Research Group

The School's transformational research projects seek to address some of the major issues both within our professions, local services, our community and beyond it. By pulling together academics working across disciplines to tackle important, social, scientific and environmental challenges, these projects are making an impact on people's lives and helping to expand our base of world-leading research.

Our research-excellence underpins the content and delivery of all our teaching programmes – undergraduate and postgraduate. We are committed to enabling all of our students to profit from a culture of learning aligned with our research and knowledge-transfer ethos, which is based upon critical enquiry, debate and self-motivation.

You can feed your appetite for knowledge at the University's research seminars, which run throughout the year on topical subjects, often closely related to individual research projects. We invite distinguished speakers from the University and beyond to deliver these free lectures.

**Widening Participation:**

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

**For further information** or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Unwin (Director of Studies) via email at [p.unwin@worc.ac.uk](mailto:p.unwin@worc.ac.uk)

**Applications can be online made at:** [www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships](http://www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships)