

# WOLFSON INSTITUTE OF POPULATION HEALTH NEWSLETTER ISSUE 58: 9 JULY 2024

In this issue of our Wolfson Institute of Population Health Newsletter, we celebrate the achievements and work of staff and students in the second half of June and early July.

## FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues

Hoping everyone is keeping well as we fast approach summer holiday time.

Of particular note in this issue is the plethora of conferences at which our industrious researchers have been presenting their work: the Inaugural Cancer Prevention Research Conference in Boston (USA), the British Menopause Society's 33rd annual scientific conference in Warwickshire, the 52nd annual Society for Academic Primary Care meeting in Bristol, the 104th annual meeting of the British Association of Dermatologists in Manchester, and the Multiple Sclerosis Frontiers conference in Liverpool.

Our presence at these meetings, across such a broad range of work, confirms our status as a leading research institute on an international scale.

Well done to all.

With best wishes

Fiona



## MEET WIPH

### MEET – SHARIFA BATTASHI (Senior Research Assistant, CPN)

#### How would you describe your roles and responsibilities?

I am a senior research assistant on the 'Participatory research into the minoritised experiences of MS care' study, which aims to provide an understanding of how people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) from South Asian and Black British backgrounds in London and Yorkshire experience MS healthcare. My responsibilities include

working with and supporting five co-researchers throughout the research process, participant recruitment, qualitative data analysis, and managing the administration of the study.

**What has been your greatest professional achievement?**

Receiving my PhD!

**What aspects of your role do you enjoy the most?**

I enjoy every aspect of my role, but particularly working with the co-researchers in our project. They are five wonderful people who have the experiences of living with MS, and who contribute rich insights to our study every single day.

**What would be your second choice as a profession?**

A librarian. My father was a writer, and I grew up with an interest in books and libraries. I spent long periods of time helping my father to organise his home library, which contained about 4,000 books.

**What do you enjoy doing outside work?**

I enjoy cooking Middle Eastern food, and spending time with my amazing family.

**Something most people don't know about you?**

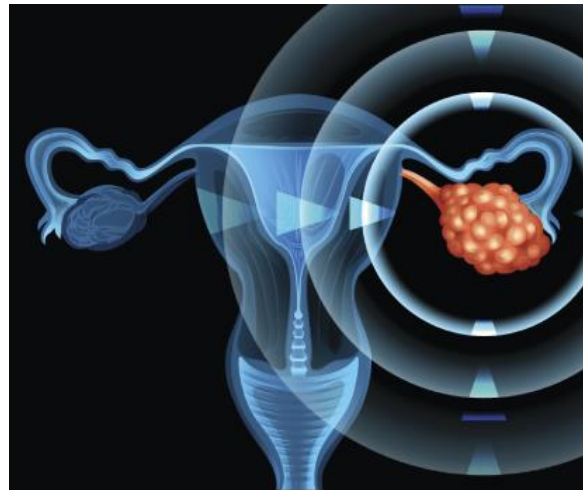
I used to be a primary school teacher for children in years 2 and 3, before doing my Masters and PHD.



## GENERAL INSTITUTE NEWS

**BGCS ovarian, tubal & primary peritoneal cancer guidelines: practice update**  
20 June (Ranjit Manchanda. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

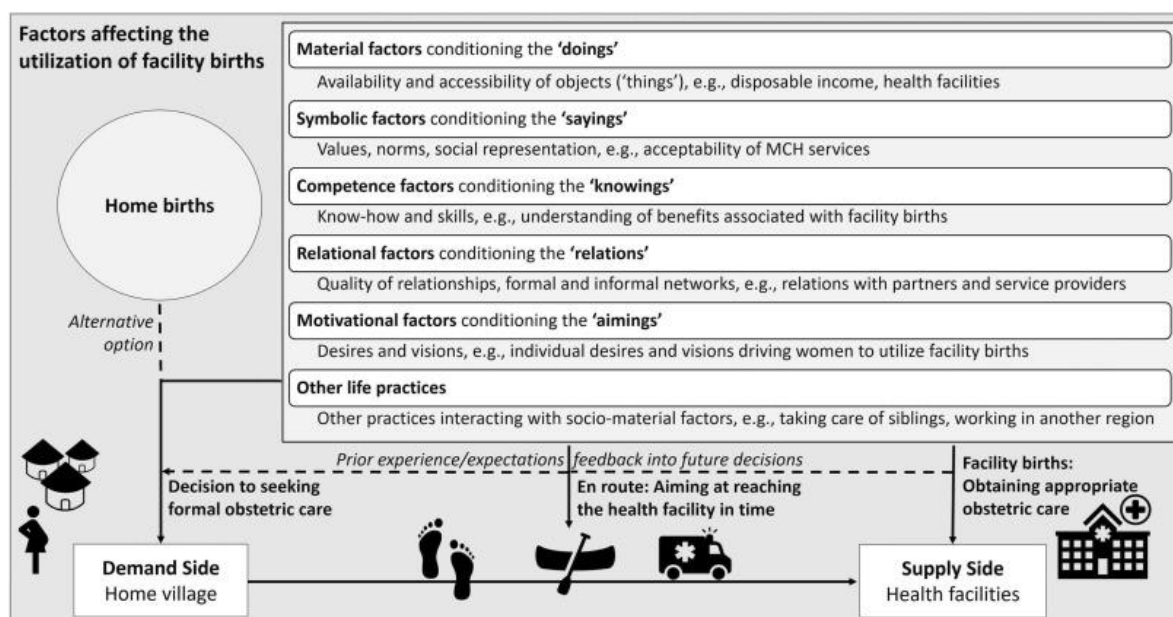
A practice update to the British Gynaecological Cancer Society (BGCS) guidelines on ovarian, tubal and primary peritoneal cancer considers developments in ovarian cancer epidemiology, surveillance and prevention, diagnosis and staging, referral and decision-making, pathology, molecular and genetic testing, patient optimisation for different grades and types of tumours, and future research priorities. Ranjit Manchanda authored the Screening and Prevention sections of the practice update.



### Barriers to facility births in rural Guinea-Bissau

20 June (Giuliano Russo. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

Although women in rural Guinea-Bissau have a stated preferences for facility births, an interview study of 258 women who had recently given birth shows that while 66% had planned a facility birth, 28% reported access barriers, and only half of those interviewed actually gave birth at a health facility. Despite formal user fee waivers, women described multiple prerequisites, such as financial means, that needed to be met to access facility births. Out-of-pocket payments were reported by 71% of women with facility births (91/128) but only 3 of these women referred to the payments as ‘barriers’. The findings of ubiquitous out of pocket payments suggest ‘commodification’ of facility births, showing that individual ability to pay remains key to utilization, and raising concerns over equity. Authors call for closer monitoring of the implementation of health system strengthening initiatives.



### All women with MS should start HRT at menopause unless contraindicated

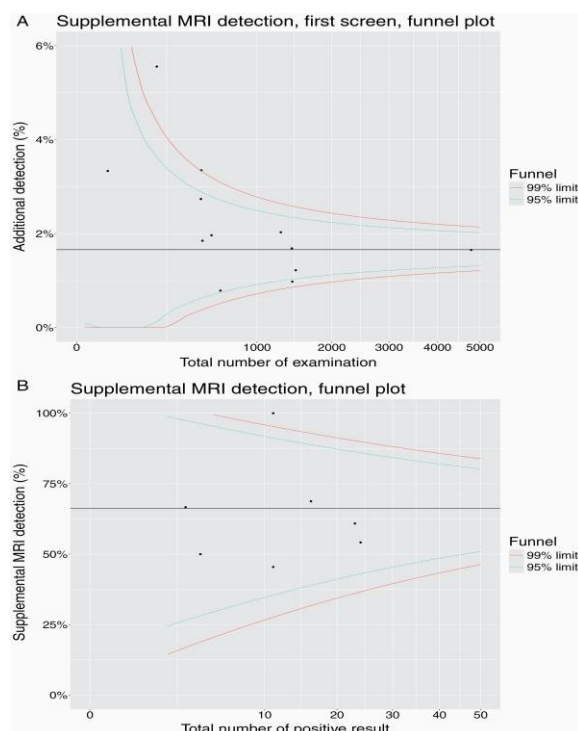
22 June (Ruth Dobson. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

A commentary article discussing the challenges in identifying whether symptoms in the 30% of MS patients who are peri- or post-menopausal originate from MS or menopause, notes that the most prominent overlap symptoms include fatigue and poor sleep, mood and cognitive disturbance, and urinary and sexual dysfunction. The authors conclude that, in the light of a paucity of data, women with MS should be advised that HRT may have benefits (eg: prevention of fragility fractures, and possible beneficial effects on symptom management) in line with the general population, and that having MS is ‘far from being a contraindication to HRT’.



### Supplemental breast MRI screening in women with dense breasts

24 June (Hui Zhen Tam, Adam Brentnall. Centre for Evaluation and Methods)

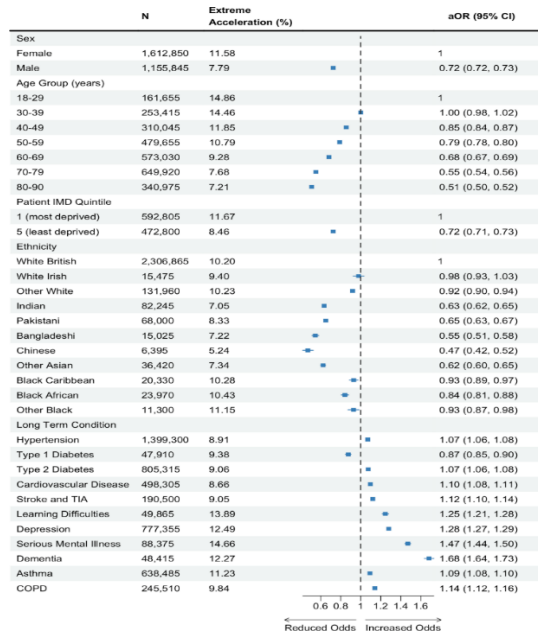


A review of evidence from 18 articles on accuracy of supplemental MRI for women with dense breasts at average or increased breast cancer risk finds that from 21,440 negative mammographic examinations, 288/320 cancers were detected by MRI. Substantial variation was observed between studies in MRI cancer detection rate, partly associated with prevalent vs incident MRI exams. Positive predictive value was higher for more recent studies. The review concludes that supplemental breast MRI following negative mammography in women with dense breasts has breast cancer detection rates of ~16.6/1000 at prevalent and ~6.8/1000 at incident MRI exams, considering both high and average risk settings.

### Trends in weight gain in England during the COVID-19 pandemic

24 June (Miriam Samuel, Fabiola Eto, Caroline Morton, Daniel Stow, Rohini Mathur. Centre for Primary Care)

Using electronic healthcare records of over 17.7 million adults with an English NHS GP, researchers investigated clinical and sociodemographic characteristics associated with rapid weight gain during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on changes in BMI values from Mar2015 - Mar2022, results showed that male sex, older age, and living in less deprived areas reduced the odds of rapid weight gain. Compared with white British individuals, all other ethnicities had lower odds of rapid pandemic weight gain. Long-term conditions increased the odds, with mental health conditions having the greatest effect.



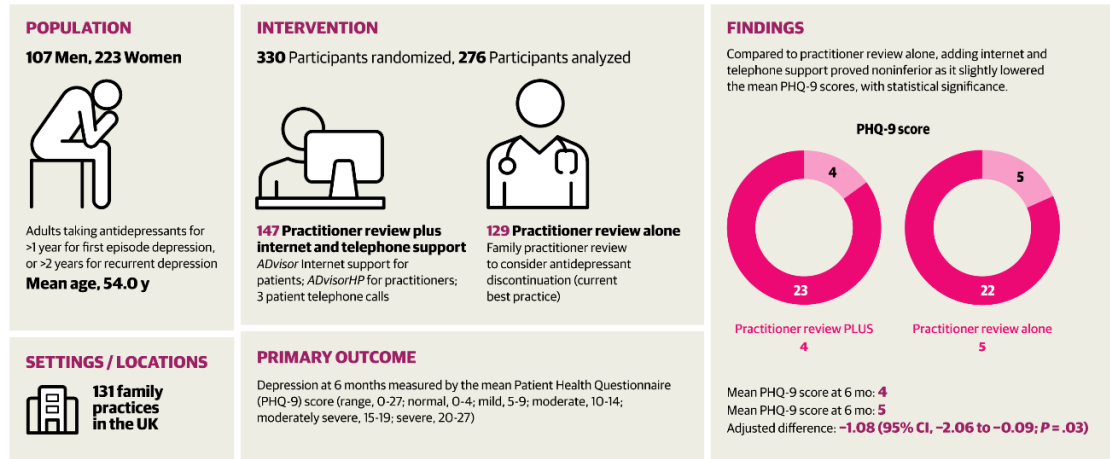
### Internet and telephone support for discontinuing long-term antidepressants

24 June (Beth Stuart. Centre for Evaluation and Methods)

To address concern over increasing long-term antidepressant treatment for depression beyond an evidence-based duration, adult patients in UK family practices receiving antidepressants for more than 1yr for a first episode of depression, or more than 2yrs for recurrent depression were allocated to receive either standard practitioner review (147 controls) or an intervention of practitioner review with added internet and telephone support (178). Results at 6 months showed that depression was slightly better with support, but the rate of discontinuation of antidepressants did not significantly increase. Researchers conclude that family practitioner review for possible discontinuation of antidepressants appeared safe and effective for more than 40% of patients willing and well enough to discontinue. This paper received wide media coverage, including The Times and Guardian.



**RCT: Internet and Telephone Support for Discontinuing Long-Term Antidepressants**



Kendrick T, Stuart B, Bowers H, et al. Internet and telephone support for discontinuing long-term antidepressants: the REDUCE cluster randomized trial. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2024;7(6):e2418383. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.18383

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**Impact of opting out of the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF)**

24 June (Victoria Tzortziou Brown, Jatinda Hayre, John Ford. Centre for Primary Care)

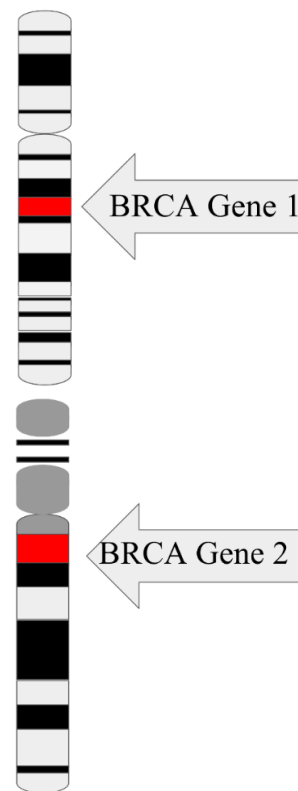


To evaluate the impact of general practices opting out of the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF - a financial incentive scheme aiming to help improve standards of care in general practice), a study of 36 Tower Hamlets practices analysed 16 QOF indicators. Given an option to opt out of QOF and instead opt into a local designed financial incentive scheme promoting more holistic care, 29 practices opted out. The intervention resulted in a small reduction in achievement of QOF-related indicators in opt-out practices, but this reduction became smaller when exceptions (situations where specific patients are excluded from individual QOF indicators) were taken into consideration.

**Online provision of BRCA1 and BRCA2 health information**

25 June (Tamar Gootzen, Ashwin Kalra, Katrina Sarig, Monika Sobočan, Sam Oxley, Subhasheene Ganesan, Caitlin Fierheller, Ranjit Manchanda. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

An evaluation of online BRCA information provided by UK organisations offering BRCA genetic testing to UK Jewish individuals assesses websites for accessibility, scope, depth, accuracy, and quality of information. From 79 identified sites, most (84%) were easy to access, but the information was often incomplete. Only 35% of sites covered more than half of the important *BRCA* topics; 82% described BRCA-associated cancers, with breast and/or ovarian cancer mentioned by 78%, but only 34% mentioned other BRCA-related cancers. Few websites provided carrier frequencies in the general (24%) and Jewish populations (20%). The overall quality of information was low-to-moderate. Researcher say these results highlight a need for better online *BRCA* information.



### Living with the nonmotor symptoms of Parkinson's Disease

25 June (Laura Smith. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

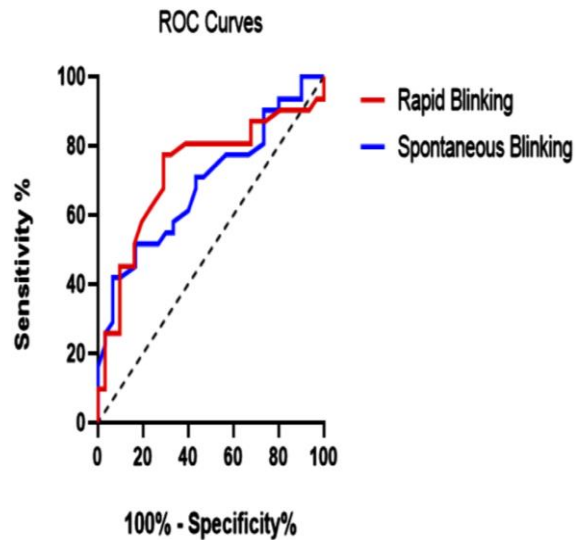


Nonmotor symptoms (NMS) in people with Parkinson's disease (PD) are poorly understood, with suboptimal clinical management. Using the photovoice method, researchers worked with 14 people with PD, who took photographs and composed written narratives to document their experiences of living with NMS. Results revealed 4 themes: Emotional well-being/ sense of self; Engaging in valued activities/ adopting a positive mindset; Social support and societal awareness to avoid isolation; and Barriers to social engagement, including the unpredictability of NMS and nonvisible NMS being neglected or misunderstood. The findings demonstrate the far-reaching impact of NMS of PD, and identify needs that could be addressed through person-centred and comprehensive approaches to care.

### Rapid Voluntary Blinking as a Clinical Marker of Parkinson's Disease

26 June (Michaela Francis, Alex Zirra, Alastair Noyce, Cristina Simonet. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

To investigate whether voluntary blinking might serve as a measurable marker of facial bradykinesia, researchers analysed video recordings of 31 Parkinson's Disease (PD) patients and 30 controls, filmed during conversation and a rapid blinking task. Results showed that rapid blinking accurately discriminated between groups, with 77% sensitivity in identifying PD patients and 71% in identifying non-Parkinson's subjects. Authors conclude that the rapid blinking task may be a simple and measurable way to identify slower facial movements in patients with Parkinson's disease.



### Inaugural Cancer Prevention Research Conference

27 June (Jo Waller. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)



At the inaugural 3-day Cancer Prevention Research Conference in Boston (USA), Jo Waller took part in a panel discussion on *Translating cancer prevention strategies within and beyond the clinic*. The panel, chaired by Andy Chan (Harvard) discussed ways to overcome the challenges of implementing cancer preventive interventions, starting in high-risk groups and potentially broader populations, while avoiding exacerbating health inequalities. This first annual conference was arranged in partnership with the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute, and aimed to showcase research to better understand cancer aetiology, risk factors, intervention development and implementation, and health inequalities.

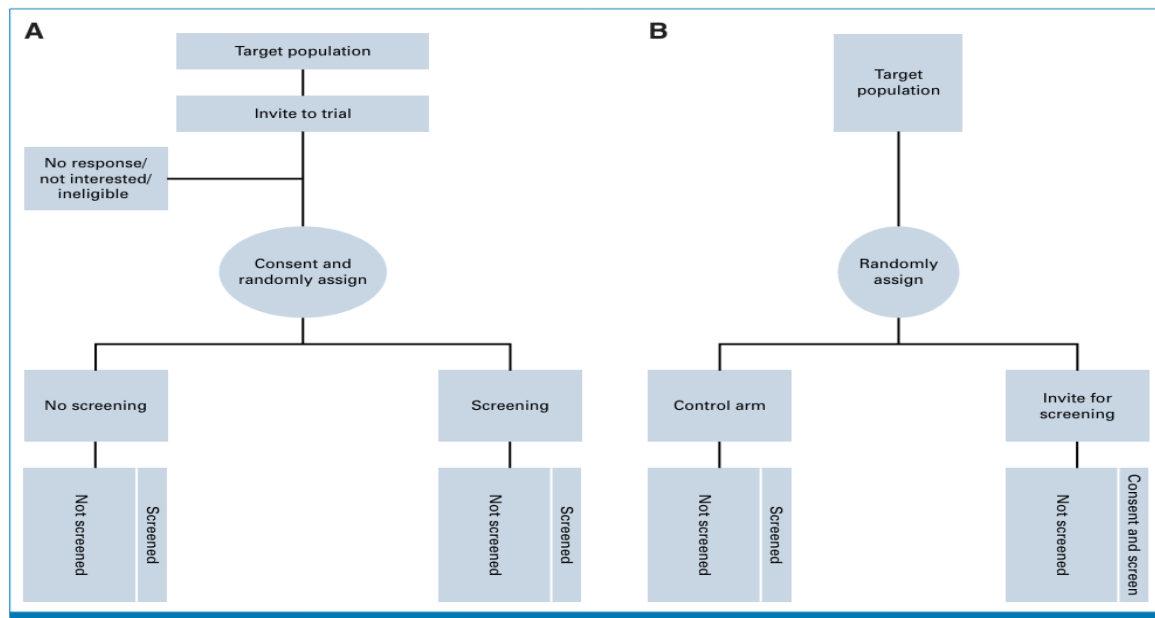
### Effect of an invitation on the effect of participation in RCTs

28 June (Peter Sasieni. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

The value of randomised controlled trials to evaluate cancer screening is widely agreed, and most RCTs have historically assigned individuals in the target



population to either a screening invitation or usual care. In a minority of trials researchers have instead chosen to first identify individuals interested in screening and willing to participate in a trial, and only randomly assign those individuals to screening or control. In a new [commentary](#), Peter Sasieni argues that this latter approach is superior.



### British Menopause Society Annual Scientific Conference

28 June (Ruth Dobson. Centre for Preventive Neurology)



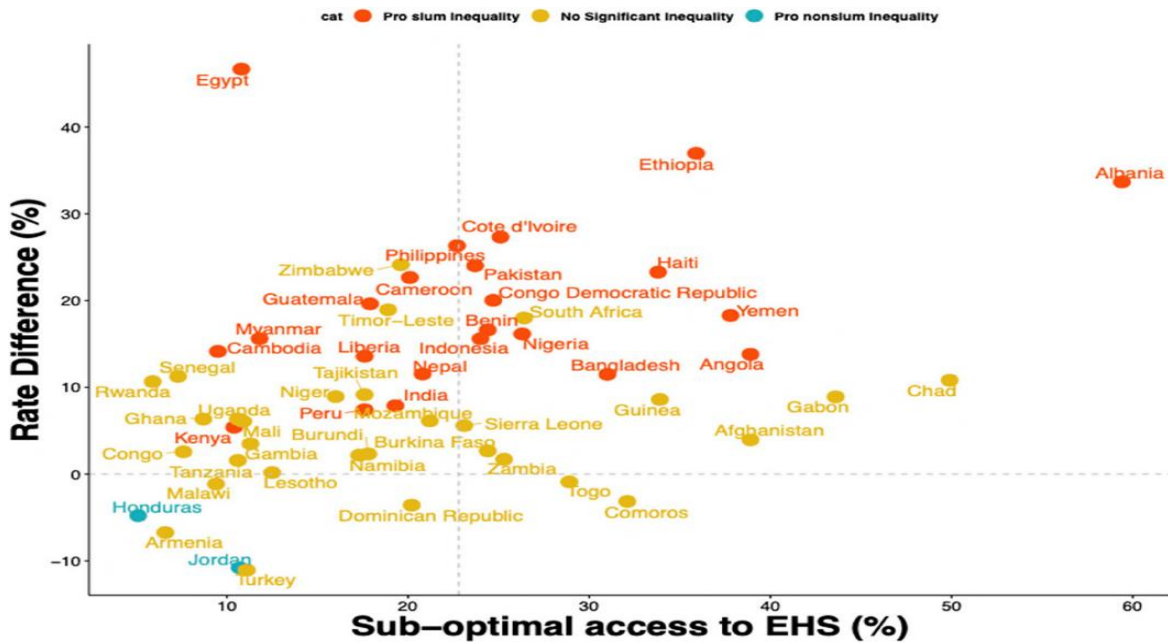
Ruth Dobson delivered a lecture on *MS, the menopause and HRT* on day 2 of the British Menopause Society's 33<sup>rd</sup> annual scientific conference, held in Warwickshire. The British Menopause Society is a specialist society associated with the RCOG, and aims to inform and guide UK healthcare professionals on menopause and all aspects of post reproductive health. The theme of this year's conference was 'Menopause: solving the puzzle.'

### Health service access inequality for mother-child pairs in slum settings

28 June (Lola Oyebo. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

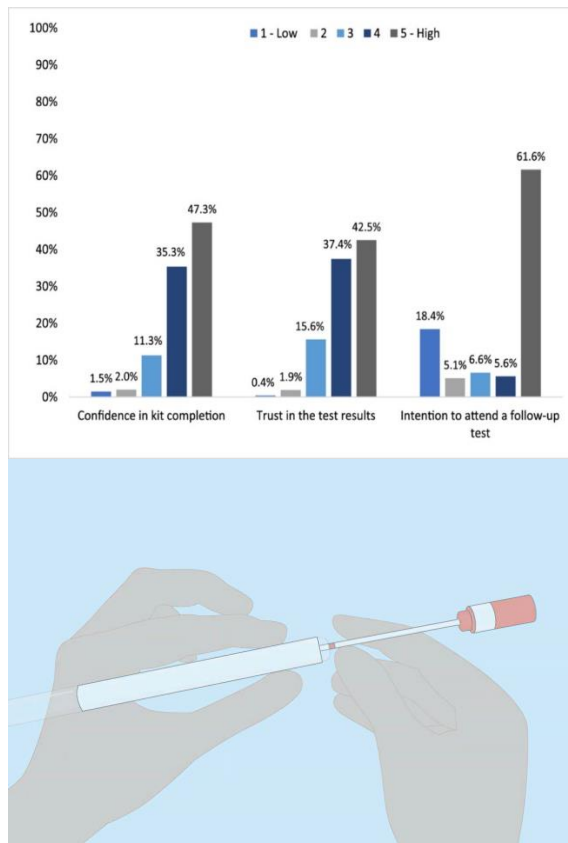
To assess contributing factors to access to essential health services (EHS) for mother-child pairs in slum versus non-slum settings, [researchers](#) use data from demographic and health surveys in 58 low- and middle-income countries. The percentage of mother-child pairs living in slums ranged from 0.5% in Egypt to 63.7% in Congo. Meta-analysis for the pooled sample showed that 31.2% of slum residents and 20% of non-slum residents had suboptimal access to EHS. Evidence of inequality in EHS access due to neighbourhood effects was found in 26 LMICs,

suggesting that increased focus on the urban poor may be important for increasing access to EHS and achieving universal health coverage goals.



### HPV screening preferences in YouScreen participants who returned a self-sample

2 July (Laura Marlow, Jo Waller. Centre for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis)

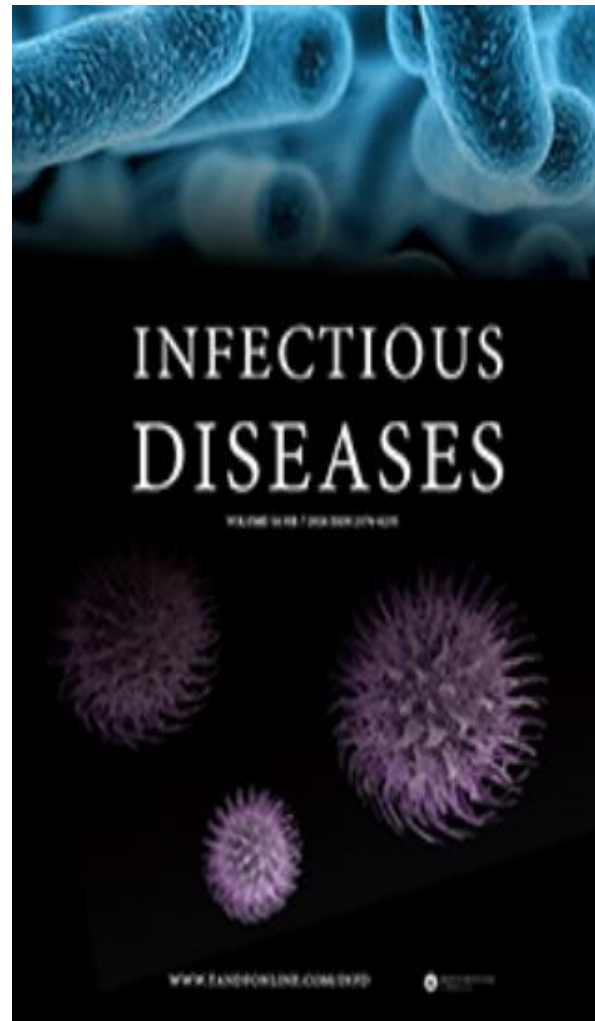


Results from a postal questionnaire returned by participants who completed human papillomavirus (HPV) self-sampling in the YouScreen trial in England show high confidence in self-sampling (82.6%) and trust in results (79.9%). Of 8338 kit completers, 2712 returned the survey, with 40.3% from ethnic minority backgrounds and 59.1% from the 2 most deprived quintiles. Most free-text comments were positive, although some reported difficulties using the device, pain or discomfort. Self-sampling was more often preferred by ethnic minority groups, overdue screeners and never attenders. Urine self-tests were preferred to vaginal tests (41.9% v 15.4%), especially among women from Asian, Black or Other Ethnic backgrounds. Study authors say that while most women (71.3% v 10.4%) would prefer self-sampling in the future, it was not a universal preference, so offering a choice will be important.

## Prevention of sexual transmission of mpox

3 July (Sara Papparini, Isabelle Whelan, Rosalie Hayes. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

Commissioned by the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, a systematic review and qualitative evidence synthesis examines mpox preventive behavioural interventions to reduce sexual acquisition, onward sexual transmission from confirmed/probable cases, and utility of asymptomatic testing. From 16 studies (1 on contact-tracing, 2 on sexual behaviour, and 13 on asymptomatic testing) researchers found insufficient evidence to fully evaluate this strategy. In the qualitative evidence synthesis, 4 studies evaluated the experiences of most affected communities. Preferences about preventive interventions were shaped by mpox information, diversity of sexual practices, accessibility and quality of mpox testing and care, and perceived cost to wellbeing. Authors conclude that limited qualitative evidence on values and preferences provides insight into factors influencing intervention acceptability, but evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent the sexual transmission of mpox remains scarce.



## COVID-19 vaccination and symptomatic child asthma prevalence

3 July (Seif Shaheen. Centre for Preventive Neurology)

## Rise in Covid jab rates may protect children against asthma attacks, study finds

Higher inoculation rates could make it less likely viruses will spread, thereby reducing risk to asthmatic children



Professor of Respiratory Epidemiology, Seif Shaheen, has been quoted in a [Guardian](#) article about a US study claiming to show that 'higher COVID-19 vaccination rates may confer protection against symptomatic asthma'. Seif's comments, provided via the Science Media Centre, noted that the results *should be treated with extreme caution*, as there were *likely to be multiple factors associated with childhood asthma and the likelihood of being vaccinated that could confound the findings*, but that such studies were *useful for generation of hypotheses to be tested in more rigorous observational studies of individuals*.

## Optimizing intrauterine insemination: effectiveness of treatment add-ons

3 July (Claudia Raperport, Javier Zamora, Priya Bhide. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

Intrauterine insemination (IUI) protocols in fertility clinics vary significantly, with multiple add-on interventions used in the hope of optimizing clinical outcomes. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 66 studies finds that, using ongoing pregnancy or live birth rates as primary outcomes, vaginal luteal phase progesterone support may improve success rates in IUI treatment. Further research is recommended to evaluate the use of endometrial scratch and ovarian follicular phase stimulation, but evidence did not support use of hydrotubation, agonist trigger (v hCG), double insemination, misoprostol, oxytocin, or bed rest after the procedure. Authors say future studies should report results according to subfertility background, as different add-ons may benefit specific patient groups.



## Society for Academic Primary Care Annual Scientific Meeting

3-5 July (Suzanne Scott, Adam Harvey-Sullivan, Anna De Simoni, Steph Taylor, Deborah Swinglehurst, Nina Fudge, Dipesh Gopal, Victoria Tzortziou Brown, Liz Steed, Ratna Sohanpal, Grace Okoli, Farhin Ahmed, Helena Painter, Iona Hindes, Fiona Walter. Centres for Cancer Screening, Prevention and Early Diagnosis/Primary Care)



# SAPC

Society for Academic Primary Care

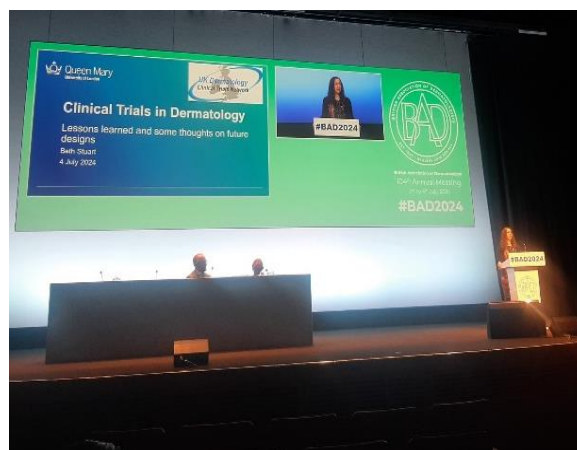


An impressive contingent of WIPH researchers presented talks and posters and chaired sessions at the 52<sup>nd</sup> annual SAPC ASM held 3-5 July in Bristol. Suzanne Scott (CCSPED) won the poster prize for her work *What advice do patients want after urgent suspected cancer referral when cancer is not found?* and Adam Harvey-Sullivan's oral presentation *Comparing cancer stage at diagnosis between migrants and non-migrants* was highly commended.

## 104th Annual Meeting of the British Association of Dermatologists

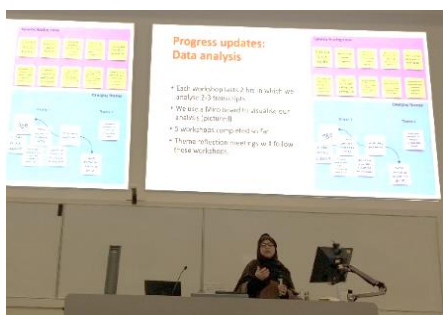
4 July (Beth Stuart. Centre for Evaluation and Methods)

In the 4 July Scientific Session of the 104th Annual Meeting of the British Association of Dermatologists, held in Manchester, Beth Stuart delivered a plenary talk on *Clinical trials in dermatology: lessons learned and thoughts for future design*. The annual meeting was delivered entirely in person, with access to content available after the conference on a virtual platform. BAD is the professional membership body for dermatologists in the UK.



## MS Frontiers conference

4-5 July (Alison Thomson, Ruth Dobson, Sharifa Battashi and Emily Tregaskis-Daniels. Centre for Preventive Neurology)



A strong CPN team attended the MS Frontiers conference in Liverpool, contributing talks and chairing sessions. Alison Thomson discussed the needs and the challenges of speaking to people honestly about MS prevention in a talk delivered in the session on making progress towards preventing MS. Sharifa Battashi shared an update on the MS Peer Research project and discussed how collaborative analysis with peer researchers has been achieved, in a session on 'The personalised approach: from research to changing how we treat people living with MS'. Ruth Dobson co-



chaired a panel on ‘Using big data at an individual level’, to which Emily Tregaskis-Daniels also contributed.

### Pregnancy and postpartum content on Instagram

5 July (Lola Oyebo. Centre for Public Health and Policy)

Idealistic portrayals on social media have been shown to lead to body dissatisfaction and low mood for women in the post pregnancy period. A study exploring content in 317 Instagram posts from 43 accounts targeting pregnant and postpartum women reveals 6 themes: reasons to exercise, weight management, guidance on doing exercise, eating well or not so well, fitting it all in, and comparison of body image. Most included accounts belonged to 35-44yo American women who were slim. Authors say the analysed content was not representative of the general population, and included posts that could shape beliefs that may lead to intrapersonal weight stigma.



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### Inaugural Lectures

Advance notice below of dates for our forthcoming round of WIPH Inaugural Lectures. Please note that venues and other details are yet to be confirmed.

Wednesday 11 September: Professor Deborah Swinglehurst  
Wednesday 25 September: Professor Lola Oyeboode  
Tuesday 12 November: Professor Sarah Finer



**Many thanks to all who so enthusiastically contribute. Please send any news items for the next newsletter to [j.a.mackie@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:j.a.mackie@qmul.ac.uk)**