

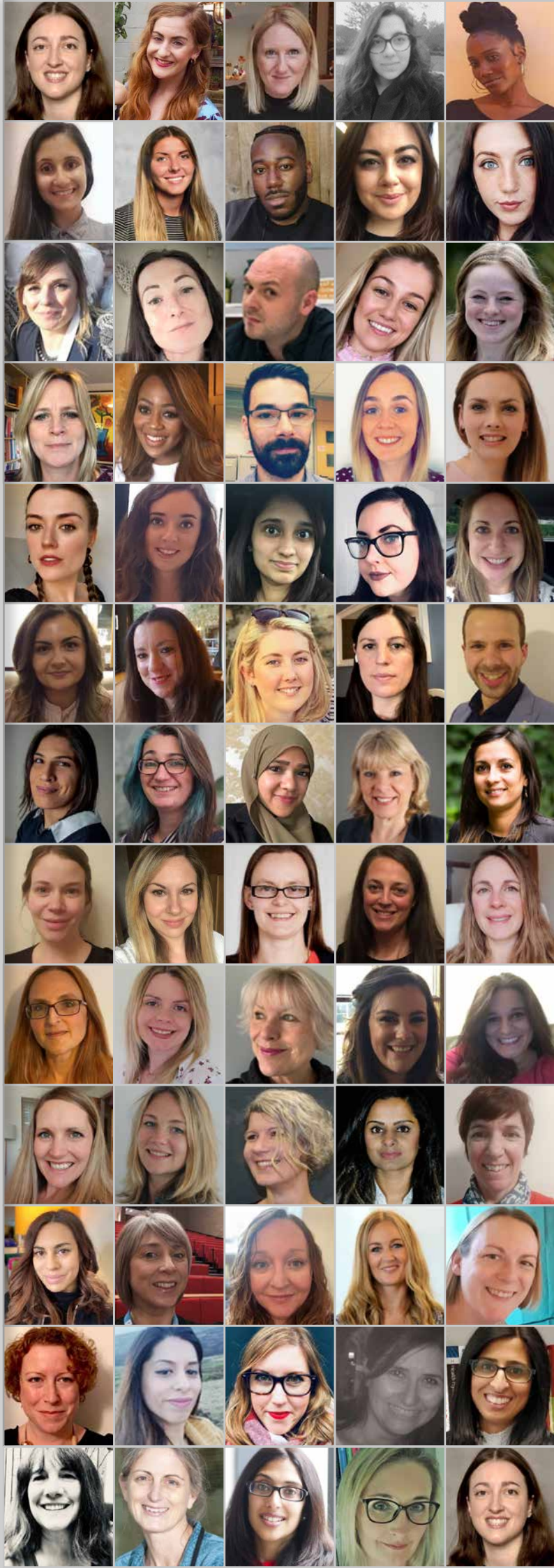


the british  
psychological society  
division of health psychology

# Health psychology career case studies

28/04/21

# CAREERS



## Forward

Welcome to the British Psychological Society's Division of Health Psychology (DHP) Career Case Study Series. Health psychology is a rapidly growing discipline with many prospective and current students keen to learn more about opportunities and career pathways. Those who would like to commission health psychology expertise are also interested in examples of our work. I'm delighted that we can present this showcase of health psychology talent through this series. Each and every case study is a shining example of the exciting and varied career pathways in health psychology.

There are three training routes to become a full member of the DHP, which is the home of UK health psychology. Two of these routes will also enable you to work in practice settings and register with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as a health psychologist, which is a protected title in the UK. All the case studies presented are from HCPC-registered health psychologists. This allows us to showcase careers that can be achieved through following the current 'Stage 1' (MSc in Health Psychology) plus 'Stage 2' (supervised practice) training in health psychology. We hope you find the information within this series helpful and I'd like to thank all those who have contributed for sharing their fabulous career journeys.

**Professor Angel Marie Chater**

**DHP chair 2019-2021**

[ChairDHP@outlook.com](mailto:ChairDHP@outlook.com)



As a current Stage 2 Trainee Health Psychologist, I appreciate that it can sometimes be difficult to envisage what a future career in health psychology might look like. In putting together this collection of case studies, we hope it provides inspiration for what a career as a health psychologist could entail.

There is such a wealth of experience and expertise within the health psychology community, it has been a privilege to learn more about people's journeys. I am so pleased we have been able to create this resource to celebrate the diversity and impact of work being undertaken by our members and to hopefully encourage and inspire our next generation of health psychologists.

**Lauren Rockliffe**

**PsyPAG DHP representative 2019-2021**

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As the DHP trainee lead and Health Psychology Trainee Network chair, I am also delighted to see these case studies, and trainees I have spoken to in our conversation café meetings have enthusiastically agreed that they would be very helpful. Being a Stage 2 trainee can be isolating, especially when you are on the BPS Stage 2 Qualification in Health Psychology (route 2) and do not have the support of a cohort. Having these case studies available can help with some common general questions and to see how health psychology can be used. This will also be of interest for Stage 1 trainees doing their MSc, who may wonder what a career in health psychology can look like and what training might be required.

These case studies show the diversity of training and that there are many different journeys you can take. We hope you enjoy reading them and learning about how health psychology can be applied.

**Dr Kristina Newman**  
DHP trainee lead 2019-2021  
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As the DHP practice lead, I am thrilled to see in these career case studies the huge ways our community is having a positive impact on health practice. It is especially impressive to see our trainee and newly qualified health psychologists working to develop new services and use health psychology in new and exciting ways. It is clear to see that we still have a marked gender imbalance in our profession, with much more work still needed to ensure diversity and representation.

To help navigate our trainee case studies, we have grouped them by training routes. We start by summarising current UK training in health psychology. I hope you enjoy reading the case studies and wish you a fruitful and rewarding career whichever route you decide to take.

**Dr Eleanor Bull**  
DHP practice lead 2019-2022  
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# Doctoral level training

# Doctoral-level training in health psychology

## What is health psychology?

The goal of health psychology is to study the psychological processes underlying health, illness and health care, and to apply these findings to the promotion and maintenance of health, the analysis and improvement of the health care system and health policy formation, the prevention of illness and disability, and the enhancement of outcomes for those who are living with an illness or disability.

## Current health psychology workforce

There are 622 health psychologists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the legal requirement to practice in the UK (based on figures from March 2021). These specialists use psychology to improve health and wellbeing in a multitude of settings. These professionals will have also achieved eligibility for full membership of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Division of Health Psychology (DHP), for which there are currently 797 full members, alongside 176 members 'In training' from a total of 2,279 members recorded at the 2020 DHP Annual General Meeting.

## Becoming a health psychologist – Core training

The first step to becoming a health psychologist is to complete a BPS-accredited undergraduate degree majoring in psychology (or accredited equivalent), or an accredited MSc psychology conversion course that confers Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) of the BPS. Those eligible for Graduate membership of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) after having gained an academic award accredited by the PSI are currently also eligible for GBC. For those with overseas undergraduate qualifications, please [contact BPS](#) to discuss routes to qualification.

## Specialist training

After this, you will undertake a period of health psychology specialist training which totals at least three years at postgraduate level, which will include an MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) and a doctoral-level award (Stage 2). There are three main routes of further training to become a full member of the BPS Division of Health Psychology and a Chartered Psychologist, summarised in Figure 1 and described below:

**Route 1 (university route):** GBC, and MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1), and BPS-accredited university Stage 2 training programme (usually a Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology, DHealthPsy). In this route, the university is accredited, and the qualification includes the title Dr, allows BPS Chartership and HCPC registration as a health psychologist.

**Route 2 (independent route):** GBC, and MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1), and a period of a minimum of two years supervised training (or part-time equivalent), enrolled on the BPS Stage 2 Qualification in Health Psychology (QHP), under the supervision of an approved Stage 2 supervisor registered on the BPS RAPPs (Register of Applied Psychology Practice Supervisors). In this route, the co-ordinating supervisor is 'accredited'. This route allows BPS Chartership and HCPC registration as a health psychologist, is a doctoral level qualification but does not include the title Dr, as the BPS is not a degree-awarding institution. This route can be studied alongside or integrated with a PhD, with work used for both awards that would lead to Dr title, BPS Chartership, and HCPC registration.

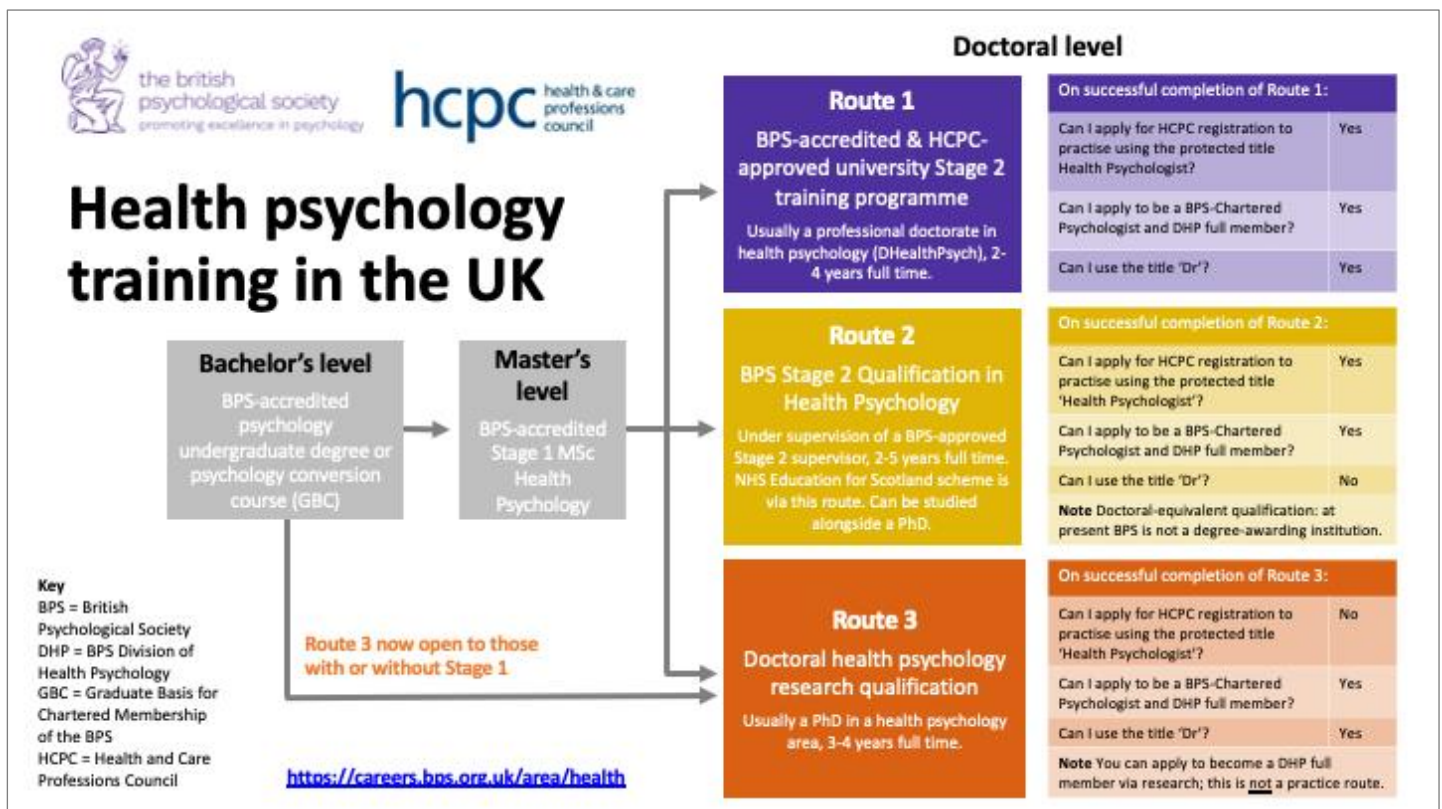
**Route 3 (PhD route):** GBC, and a period of research at doctoral level (usually a PhD), in a Health Psychology area. This route may or may not include an MSc, does not include eligibility for registration with the HCPC, but allows for BPS Chartership and the PhD confers the title Dr.



Only routes 1 and 2 secure the [Standards of Proficiency](#) required for you to register with the HCPC as a practitioner or registered psychologist, with the legally protected title ‘Health Psychologist’, which is one of seven types of practitioner psychologist regulated by the HCPC. This is needed if you would like to work as a health psychologist in settings such as the NHS or private practice. All of the trainees showcased in the case studies here are pursuing Stage 2 via route 1 or route 2.

These two routes also require a BPS-accredited MSc Health Psychology, known as Stage 1 training. At the time of writing there are currently 42 BPS-accredited MSc Health Psychology courses in the UK, including options for distance learning and study abroad. Some of our more senior health psychologists mention having qualified via ‘grand-parenting’. This was an option previously available for experienced psychologists and those who had started their training pre-2001 when at this time the BPS were still regulating psychology and awarding practicing certificates. When statutory regulation moved to the HCPC for practitioner psychologists in July 2009, experienced psychologists and those with full membership of the DHP at the time, were able to register with the HCPC.

As with any health professional training, training in health psychology is constantly evolving to meet regulatory standards and the needs of the evolving healthcare and workforce landscape. A review of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 training standards is underway by the DHP Training Committee (responsible for the university accredited routes of training, both Stage 1 and Stage 2) and the QHP Committee (responsible for route 2 of Stage 2). [Our HPU article](#) provides more information and reflections from current and previous route 2 trainees about the BPS QHP and ideas for future developments.



### Training costs and funding

Increasingly there are bursaries and funded places for health psychology trainees. For instance, since 2008 the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Training Scheme has offered funded, salaried places for health psychologists to complete route 2 whilst working in NHS Scottish Health Boards. Some local authorities have funded both route 1 and route 2, and route 3 is often funded through PhD studentships. Creating more funded opportunities and support for Stage 2 training is a key DHP strategic priority. Training costs for routes 1-3 can be found at the various university providers for professional doctorates, PhD programmes and those who offer Stage 2 supervision, which can be integrated with a PhD research programme. The costs for route 2 can be found on the BPS website. Further information on the NES training programme can be found on their website.

### Further information and support

If you are at the beginning of your career in health psychology, or are considering training in health psychology and are wondering about next steps, do reach out for advice. Nearly all case studies mention the supportiveness and friendliness of our vibrant health psychology community. If you are currently studying health psychology, do make the most of careers events, your careers service and the expertise of your course leaders and supervisors. Beyond this, the BPS hold regular careers events and the website has more information on psychology careers (<https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/health>). You can keep up with what's going on in health psychology through the DHP newsletter that is sent out regularly to members and can be found online. The DHP Twitter account is full of useful information and aims to support our members to promote what they are up to, you can follow @DivHealthPsych. The annual DHP conference is an excellent way to connect with health psychologists and there are several Facebook groups where health psychologists and trainees share tips and advice. Finally, the Health Psychology Trainee Network (HPTN) is a collaborative, set up by trainees, for trainees. They meet on a regular basis for informal 'conversation cafés' and all trainees are welcome. You can find out more by following them @trainee\_network

DHP is the home of UK health psychology, and we are here to support you in your career pathways. We hope you enjoy this career case study series.

**On behalf of the British Psychological Society Division of Health Psychology Committee 2020-2021.**

**Route one**



## Health psychology training

I completed my Psychology BSc degree at the University of York in 2011. I then did an MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at the University of Nottingham from 2015 to 2017. In 2018, I started the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology (Stage 2) at Staffordshire University.

## Current role

After my MSc, I started working at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust as Local Lead for a national innovation and research programme in cystic fibrosis called CFHealthHub. CFHealthHub is a digital behaviour change and self-care programme that supports people with cystic fibrosis to build habits for treatment-taking. Alongside this role, I now work as National Quality Improvement Programme Manager on the same programme.

## Work experience

After finishing my undergraduate degree, I volunteered as a Research Assistant at University of Nottingham. I also volunteered at the Stroke Association, which led to me securing a full-time position as Co-ordinator of the stroke support service in North Derbyshire. After this, I worked for a digital health company, applying health psychology principles to a smartphone health application. I also volunteered as an Assistant Psychologist in a health psychology service.

## Career challenges

Roles are often advertised with fixed-term contracts due to the lack of long-term funding for many services or projects, which is challenging in terms of job security. I also find the lack of health psychologist roles being advertised a bit demoralising; it was disappointing to find the 'health psychology' service I volunteered for was comprised of clinical psychologists only and no health psychologists.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I first discovered health psychology three years after finishing my undergraduate degree. I felt 'in limbo' in terms of my professional identity, having a degree in psychology but not being a qualified psychologist. I was looking on the BPS website at career options when I came across the health psychology training routes. It was a lightbulb moment as I realised that health psychology encompassed exactly what I was interested in! Many things intrigued me from working in different healthcare settings and I was interested in understanding more about behaviour change, adherence and patient-practitioner communication.

## Advice for students and trainees

Think about volunteering or getting a part-time job to develop competence in a particular area. These are great ways to make professional contacts, hear about job opportunities in an organisation, and see if this is an area that you could see yourself working in.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Leeds in 2012 and my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at Liverpool John Moores University between 2015-2017.

In January 2019, I enrolled on the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology (Stage 2) at Liverpool John Moores University.

## Current role

I currently work full time within the NHS supporting the Greater Manchester children and young people's workforce strategy which centres around the development of training opportunities, supervision, leadership pathways and developing wellbeing initiatives for those working within CAMHS and the wider system supporting children's emotional wellbeing. Alongside this, I work clinically in the core CAMHS service and within the paediatric psychosocial service working with young people and families under the renal, urology and endocrine departments. During my training, I have delivered teaching to hospital staff around the role of illness perceptions as barriers to treatment adherence and supported the development of a wellbeing programme for operations managers of a large hospitality organisation.

I am currently focusing on my research competency. My projects centre around engagement in health behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Work experience

I worked for almost 5 years as a mental health support worker providing client centred support with daily living. After completion of my MSc, I began working within the NHS for a lifestyle support service promoting health behaviour change in the community, as a research assistant alongside the Christie Patient Centred Research

team in south Manchester and as an honorary assistant psychologist for a social enterprise providing psychological support for young people in Trafford.

## What interested you in health psychology?

From a young age I had always been interested in why people engage in certain health behaviours and why others do not. It was not until I started a health psychology module as part of my undergraduate degree that I realised that my interests could be captured in a branch of psychology.

## Future aspirations

I am really looking forward to qualifying and continuing to pave the way for health psychologists within the NHS. I would love to continue to work with young people, and to support research and intervention that promotes positive change in practice.

## Advice for students and trainees

Try to enjoy the journey not just the destination – there is so much to learn along the way.



## Health psychology training

I completed a BSc in Psychology at the University of Sunderland in 2001 and originally intended to undertake a master's degree in forensic psychology. After spending a few years working as a Psychological Assistant within custodial settings, I then decided to go travelling. It was upon returning from this break that I started working within health and social care and gained experience in a number of different roles and settings. In 2018 I gained an MSc in Health Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University. This affirmed my desire to become a health psychologist and in January 2019 I started a professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University.

## Current role

I am currently employed as a Senior Public Health Specialist within Bradford Metropolitan District Council; this is a full-time role and is also my placement for the professional doctorate of which I am in my second year. In this role I am the Public Health Lead for Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco providing strategic leadership across the district and overseeing commissioning and service delivery. My role also involves managing several projects which contribute to Living Well, Bradford's system wide approach to reducing premature and preventable morbidity and mortality. In addition, I provide support and advice to both the public health team and colleagues across the wider remit of the council in embedding behavioural science in all aspects of their work.

## Work experience

I started my career by volunteering within prisons and did this for a year before gaining my first paid role. I have worked within several different health and social care settings, including prisons and community services, which has involved working with diverse client groups. My experience has included both practitioner roles as well as more managerial and strategic roles; I have been

employed by various organisations including the NHS, HMPS, third sector charities and a local authority. I have always tried to push myself outside of my comfort zone by taking on differing roles and responsibilities.

## Future aspirations

My main goal at the moment is to finish the doctorate and become a registered health psychologist. Following that I would really like to continue to raise the profile and value of health psychology within public health. I would love to see more health psychologists/trainee health psychologists employed within public health teams!

## Advice for students and trainees

Gain as much experience as possible and ensure that you embed reflection into your work from an early stage; the more you do this the more it becomes automatic. Don't worry if things don't go to plan; things won't always work out as you had hoped but there is always learning to be taken. Finally, don't rush to reach your destination; the journey is just as important and if you take your time and embrace opportunities and challenges it will really help in developing your skills as a health psychologist.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate studies in English and Psychology at the University of Malta. Following that, I decided that the best way for my career was to continue my studies in UK, so I read for my MSc Health Psychology at Coventry University. I returned to Malta to be with my family for a while, but I needed to feel prepared enough to take on client work, and that is why I enrolled in the DPsych Health Psychology programme at Glasgow Caledonian University.

## Current role

I am currently a Stage 2 student at Glasgow Caledonian University taking on a number of placements. My main placement has been with the charity Chest, Heart, & Stroke Scotland (CHSS). I feel privileged working within this organisation, as the support and dedication to the clients is superb. I have started a service in Glasgow with CHSS to provide therapeutic support for carers of stroke survivors. So far it has been successful, and as the service has been taking place online, it has now expanded to all areas in Scotland.

## Work experience

I have had the opportunity to work with mental health patients within a Maltese organisation, and it was this very experience which made me discover health psychology. I realised that the theories and approach mirrored my way of being more than a clinical role. I also worked within the Ministry for Education and Employment (Malta) as an Assistant Psychologist under the supervision of an educational psychologist. This was one of my favourite work experiences so far, as I met a fantastic team and learnt about assessments, interventions, and managing cognitive and behavioural difficulties. I maintained and developed these skills further while on placement with NHS Lanarkshire (Wishaw), where I worked in the role of Trainee Health Psychologist and offered therapeutic support to Bariatric patients.

## Career challenges

I find that it is difficult still to demonstrate the reason why health psychology should be considered when people are searching for therapeutic support. The difficulty in understanding what the role of a health psychologist really does is also evident by other psychological areas themselves. In fact, there are few job posts advertising for a health psychologist for areas where we may be able to have better experience or knowledge.

## Future aspirations

Apart from being a private practitioner, I would like to take on a lecturing role in the future and add more research to the field of health psychology.

## Advice for students and trainees

Read a lot about different therapeutic approaches and choose the ones that fit your abilities. Also, be open and honest with lecturers- they are a great source of support, and inspiration.



## Health psychology training

- BSc Psychology (2010), London Metropolitan University
- MSc Health Psychology (2011), London Metropolitan University
- Professional Doctorate (expected 2021), University of the West of England (UWE)

## Current Role

Currently, I am relocating to Bermuda to complete my doctoral research.

## Work experience

Following the completion of my MSc, I returned to Bermuda and began working under supervised practice within a MDT in Cardiac Rehabilitation. My contribution included facilitating and analysing pre-assessment questionnaires, conducting 1:1 assessments, formulations, and interventions, and leading a psychoeducation group about behaviour change. Additionally, I provided psychological support within a MDT which provides endocrinology and metabolic services.

I relocated to the UK and enrolled in the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology programme at UWE. In London, I joined a NHS Clinical Health Psychology Department and contributed to the Gynaecology MDT as the counsellor in the Termination of Pregnancy Clinic. Also, I worked with both internal and external psychologists to provide psychological support for patients living with diabetes.

At the University of Buckingham, I was a lead lecturer in the Undergraduate Health Psychology module and co-designed and co-delivered the MSc Health Psychology Professional Skills in Health Psychology module.

## Career challenges

I struggled with Imposter Syndrome when faced with new challenges which led to questions surrounding my professional identity. Initially, I solely identified as a practitioner, but throughout my training I gained a love for academia whilst fulfilling the Stage 2 competencies. Also, there were challenges with diversity, considering I was

usually the only person of colour in most settings and spoke with an accent. I strategised and introduced myself in every setting with, “Hi, I’m Tameisha. I’m from Bermuda and I have a Bermudian accent”. It quickly solved the mystery of my country of origin and was a great way to ease into lectures, conversations with other health professionals and engagement in 1:1 patient sessions.

## What interested you in health psychology?

As a volunteer in a USA surgical unit, I accompanied a surgeon to a pre-operative consultation with the patient and family members. After the surgeon left the room, the patient asked me to interpret the consultation information into “regular words”. Without knowing the terminology, I learned about the importance of doctor-patient communication and health literacy when making health-related decisions. This experience increased my interest in liaising with medical professionals and patients and years later, I began pursuing a career as a health psychologist.

## Advice for students and trainees

When choosing your route to Stage 2 be mindful of who you are and the support you require to achieve your goals. Familiarise yourself with the BPS competencies and HCPC standards of proficiency. This will allow you to effectively strategise to fulfil multiple competencies by seeking appropriate, mutually beneficial opportunities for professional development. Confidently develop professional relationships; your module leaders and supervisors will ultimately become your colleagues. Be flexible, teachable, and willing to obtain experiences to develop your professional identity. Health psychologists contribute a unique skillset across all healthcare settings.





## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate course at Nottingham Trent University in 2012 in Psychology and Criminology and went straight onto my MSc at the same University in Forensic Mental Health completing this in 2013. I only completed my Stage 1 in 2019 at Ulster University, distance learning whilst working as an Assistant Psychologist. I am currently completing my Professional Doctorate at Staffordshire University.

## Current role

Assistant Psychologist in Health Psychology training at a medium secure service with patients who have mental health difficulties combined with a forensic history.

## Work experience

After completing my MSc, I first began working as a Healthcare Support Worker in a medium secure service. In this role, I was, overtime, able to co-facilitate a treatment programme for patients. After approximately 1 year in post, I was successful in obtaining my first AP post (although part-time) in Randomised Control Trial (RCT) in the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway exploring treatment efficacy of Mentalisation Based Therapy (MBT) for Anti-Social Personality Disorder. I held this post for several years, before I was successful in obtaining my current AP post which is now my placement for the Professional Doctorate Programme. I have previously undertaken voluntary work a head injury service and in a prison during my BSc and MSc.

## Career related challenges

I have found health psychology and health psychologists have a vast amount to contribute and have specialist skills and knowledge, but it's an area in psychology that others are less familiar with, particularly within a forensic setting where professionals are more familiar with other kinds of applied psychologists. I have found when educating forensic colleagues about health

psychology and the potential contributions health psychology can contribute within forensic services, other professionals have been very receptive to health psychology.

## What interested you in health psychology?

My experience has primarily been within forensic settings and saw the potential health-related clinical need when working with my existing client group. However, their health-related clinical/psychological needs were often not routinely considered due to other presenting clinical and forensic needs. At this stage, I was less familiar with health psychology, so I began to do my own research to develop my knowledge of the area. I was helpfully put in touch with a health psychologist by another colleague where my interest began to develop further. I then decided to complete Stage 1 and the rest is history.

## Future aspirations

I have a real interest in trauma and mental health and the link this has with a range of health-related behaviours, health outcomes and lifestyles. I would like to practice as an applied psychologist within the NHS. Although, I have a set of interests I am open to exploring my career options as a health psychologist and working in different settings and client groups.

## Advice for students and trainees

There was about 8 years between me finishing my BSc and starting my Professional Doctorate. My biggest advice is to move onto your next route (including the application/interview process as these are draining) when you are absolutely ready clinically, emotionally and personally. There is often the pressure to start applying when your peers are or when expected to by others, but this just adds unnecessary pressure on yourself and can knock your confidence.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at University of Liverpool, graduating in 2014 and went on to complete my MSc (Stage 1 training) at University of Hull in 2016-2017. I began my Stage 2 training via the university route in 2018 and am currently in my final year of the Professional Doctorate at University of West of England (Bristol).

## Work experience

After my undergraduate, I worked in various support roles including inpatient mental health, brain injury and community settings. On completion of my MSc I secured a role in an NHS clinical health psychology department providing psychological support for individuals with physical health conditions where I began my Stage 2 training.

## Current role

In 2020 (mid-lockdown) I began a new role as Trainee Health Psychologist for an independent healthcare company providing a range of services including diabetes prevention and weight management. I love being able to apply Health Psychology theory to improve the health and wellbeing of so many people.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I've always been interested in behaviour and feel passionate about the positive impact psychology can have on physical health. I didn't finish my undergraduate degree knowing that I wanted to pursue a career in health psychology (in fact I didn't even know it was an option at that point) – I decided to do my MSc in Health Psychology because it really fit with my interests and I wanted to learn more about behaviour change, and the psychology of health and illness. By the time I finished my MSc and realised that I had actually enjoyed it, I was certain that health psychology was the right route for me.

## Future aspirations

My aspirations for the future are to continue working in an applied setting where I can really use the skills and knowledge to improve the health of individuals in a multidisciplinary setting. There really is so much health psychology can contribute so I'm excited to see where my career takes me in the future.

## Advice for students and trainees

Enjoy the journey! I've learned so much in every job I've had since graduating from my undergraduate, and as I near the end of my training I realise that it's a constant learning process and that enjoying the journey and experiences along the way is just as important as reaching professional and/or academic goals whatever that may be.



## Health psychology training

I completed my both my BSc in Health Psychology (2012) and MSc Health psychology (2014) at the University of Bedfordshire. I started the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) in November 2018.

## Current role

I am a Sexual Health Adviser in a Sexual Health/HIV service. My role is varied and includes providing information, advice and counselling to patients diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) to help them understand and manage their condition, providing support to survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault, delivering brief behaviour-change interventions to improve sexual health, and contact tracing for patients recently diagnosed with an STI.

## Work experience

I developed an interest in sexual health whilst completing a health psychology module during my BSc. Upon completion, I started working as a Young People's Sexual Health Outreach Worker across South London. I joined an NHS young people's sexual health service in Newham in 2014 and left in 2018 to join a young people's integrated sexual health and substance misuse service in Tower Hamlets.

I briefly worked as a guest lecturer at a Further Education college in 2019, teaching the health psychology module on the BTEC Extended Diploma in Health & Social Care. The experience was enjoyable as my health psychology interest originated whilst completing the same module 11 years prior.

## Career challenges

With sexual health funded by local authorities, budget cuts have resulted in less investment in sexual health services, particularly preventative work. This often results in the medicalisation of sexual health services with little opportunity for psychologists.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Health psychology is a discipline I can relate to and apply to my own life. I was able to develop an understanding about determinants of behaviour change relevant to physical health. For example, as a young person, I was constantly told about the high rates of STIs among young people but could not understand why. My health psychology studies provided me with this understanding.

## Future aspirations

I'd like a varied role that combines client-facing support, teaching and research. I'd also like to collaborate with other professionals to develop interventions to tackle the high rates of youth violence seen in London and other urban cities.

## Advice for students and trainees

Health psychology is a broad and exciting discipline. Make use of the friendly health psychology community if you would like to explore opportunities in sectors outside your day-to-day role.



## Health psychology training

I graduated from the MSc Health Psychology at the University of Stirling in 2016, before undertaking the DPsych programme at Glasgow Caledonian University in 2018 and will graduate as a practitioner health psychologist in 2021.

## Current role

My week is currently split between working as an assistant psychologist within the Heart Manual Department (NHS Lothian), attending university and being on placement. At the Heart Manual, I support the team in developing and providing an evidenced home-based self-management cardiac rehabilitation programme to services across the UK. On placement, I'm based in a local third-sector organisation where I provide therapeutic support using approaches such as person-centred therapy, CBT, MI, and ACT. I also support people with health behaviour change, drawing on all the wonderful knowledge, theories and models from health psychology and other relevant disciplines.

## Work experience

During my undergrad, I volunteered with a local organisation that supported people with alcohol related brain damage. I also secured an internship in perinatal mental health and explored birthing experiences in my final year research. Post-graduation, I became a nursing assistant for NHS Lothian. I learnt so much in this role and had the privilege of supporting people in various hospital settings as part of a multidisciplinary team. This experience, combined with the MSc, led to my current role at the Heart Manual.

## Career challenges

As health psychology is such a developing area of applied psychology, it has sometimes been challenging to communicate what we can do to others, particularly whilst setting up placements in services that may not have worked with health psychologists previously.

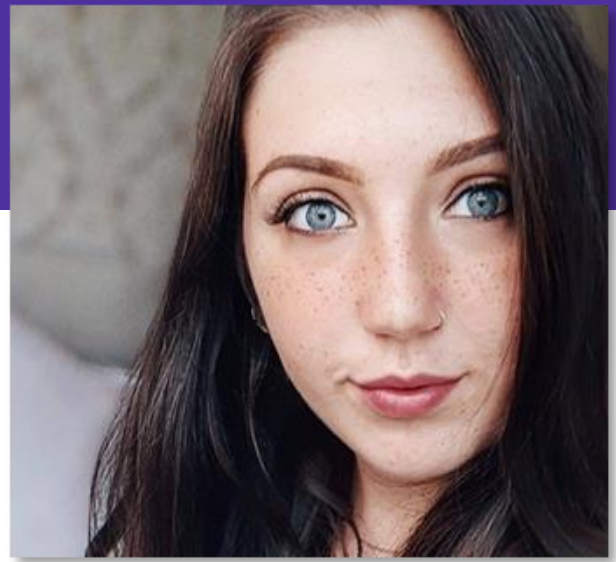
## What interested you in health psychology?

I've always been fascinated with human biology, nursing and medicine. I became really intrigued during my undergraduate degree when learning about the role of psychology and how we can apply our understanding to support people.

Future aspirations: Post qualification, I'm hoping to pursue a portfolio career and private practice. I think the breadth and depth of our competencies as health psychologists can be applied in so many different roles and contexts, so I'm excited to see where it goes!

## Advice for students and trainees

Keep going! It can be really difficult and I've had moments where I've wondered whether to pursue a different career, however no matter how stuck or difficult it has felt, working with clients and developing my practice has been hugely rewarding.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc Psychology in 2018 and my part-time MSc (Stage 1) Health Psychology (Stage 1) in 2020, both at the University of Derby. I then enrolled onto the Stage 2 Professional Doctorate training programme at the Staffordshire University in the same year.

## Current role

I currently work as a Personal Programme Assistant (PPA) for a private healthcare company, Reach Personal Injury LTD. Reach focuses on rehabilitation for individuals with acquired brain injury. In my role as PPA I help to develop patient-centred rehabilitation goals, and apply psychological theory to help clients progress through their rehabilitation and achieve the best possible quality of life. In this role I work as part of a multi-disciplinary team comprised of a variety of health and legal professionals.

## Work experience

My first health related work experience was during my BSc, where I worked as a Pharmacy Assistant delivering a needle exchange and methadone service. I applied this experience to BSc assignments by planning an intervention that could make needle exchange services more accessible and ethical in order to encourage more female participation. I also gained a working knowledge of various health conditions and participating in positive health promotion activities such as measuring blood pressure and encouraging uptake of flu vaccinations.

Following this, I began working in neurological rehabilitation as a Therapy Assistant for a private healthcare company, Neuro Support Services. This role introduced me to a range of complex long-term conditions such as brain injury and amputation and demonstrated how psychological health and physical health are intertwined.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I was drawn to health psychology due to the holistic focus on prevention and treatment of psychological and physical ill health. I believe prevention of ill-health and the promotion of positive health behaviour is just as important as treating ill health. I feel that health psychology training is unique in this area, as health psychologists are the only healthcare professional group trained to doctoral level in behaviour change interventions.

## Future aspirations

I aspire to work in an applied health psychologist role within the NHS, utilising behaviour change interventions to help a clinical population manage long-term conditions. I would ideally like to continue working with individuals with neurological conditions, however, I am also keen to explore new avenues.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in psychology in 2011 at the University of Southampton and then went on to complete my MSc in Health Psychology at Southampton in 2013. In 2017, I completed a Post Graduate Certificate in 'Advanced Practice in Psychological Wellbeing' and I am currently enrolled on the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at the University of the West of England, which I started in 2018.

## Current role

I currently work within a long-term condition IAPT service, providing CBT based interventions for patients with a LTC and comorbid anxiety or depression. I am currently in my final year of the professional doctorate and am completing a piece of qualitative research entitled 'health care professionals' experience of working towards a collaborative care model through joint working with LTC IAPT services'.

## Work experience

Whilst completing my MSc I was working as a health care assistant, providing domiciliary care to older adults. After completing my MSc I went on to gain NHS experience within a tier 3 weight management service and within a health coaching service, both of which sparked my interest in working with behaviour change interventions. I also took on an honorary assistant psychologist role at the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth, working within the respiratory department.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I always had an interest in psychology generally and knew that I wanted to become a psychologist in an applied setting. It was my love for working with older adults as a health care assistant which enabled me to see the link between physical and mental health. When I read the prospectus for the MSc in Health Psychology I knew straight away that this was what I wanted to pursue.

## Future Aspirations

I want to continue to work in applied roles within the NHS to facilitate behaviour change. I have a few areas of interest- including mental health, older adults, illness prevention and weight management. I thoroughly enjoyed working within the community in previous roles and would be really interested in being community based again.

## Advice for students and trainees

I found completing the professional doctorate through the taught route invaluable as the friendships you make really see you through the course. The teaching has been great, but I've learnt so much more from the others in my cohort. I would also really recommend finding a work placement that can tick all of the competencies as this will prevent a lot of stress!



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at Swansea University in 1999 (BSc. Econ Psychology and Anthropology), then undertook a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management in 2002. After developing an interest in health and fitness (and another qualification!), I gained a counselling qualification, before studying for an MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at Cardiff Metropolitan University, in 2013. My Stage 2 training commenced in November 2019, at the University of the West of England.

## Current role

I am a Quality Assurance Officer for Social Services with responsibility to ensure provision of the highest possible standards of care. I also review how the service has affected the wellbeing of our service users and staff, especially during the COVID pandemic. I am working with young people with ACEs, to find out what support helps them to become more resilient. This will form the basis of my doctoral research. I am also a wellbeing champion working towards improved support for the health and wellbeing of our employees. We organise engagement events and develop guidance on physical, emotional and mental health, and support the training of potential wellbeing champions.

## Work experience

My interest in health psychology developed whilst working for Social Services. I engaged with individuals who have been involved with us to ensure that the care and support received was outcome focused and high quality. I see first-hand the benefit of prevention, and the impact that behaviour change interventions might have on the health of the population and mitigate the impact on health and social care.

## Career challenges

There remains lack of understanding of the role of health psychologists. Person specifications in job vacancies for “clinical psychologists”, often require the skills and experiences that are also held by health psychologists. I also regularly explain that I am not a “clinical psychologist in training”, and also not on a “plan B” after changing my clinical psychology path! I do however feel that there is a growing field of opportunity for health psychologists, specifically in our knowledge of the psychological factors that motivate us to make healthier decisions in a timely manner to prevent rather than treat.

## Advice for students and trainees

Familiarise yourself with the relevant competencies and involve yourself in roles that would help to obtain these. Be innovative, for example demonstrating how you relate to people, your understanding of confidentiality, or highlighting your understanding of other professionals’ positions in relation to your own. You will be surprised at how many opportunities you come across.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc. in Psychology (2006) and MSc. Health Psychology (2008) at the University of the West of England Bristol. Returning more recently (2019) to undertake my Stage 2 training on the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology degree programme.

## Current role

Specialising in sexual health I currently work within NHS based Genito-Urinary clinics as a Senior Health Adviser, providing psychological support around the management of Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV. From this platform I also feature as a presenter on E4's television series 'The Sex Clinic' and regularly provide teaching and training on programmes of academic study and industry accredited training courses.

## Work experience

Adopting a creative approach to the application of psychology has enabled me to work across a wide range of industries. Over the years I have worked for sexual health charities supporting people living with HIV, global businesses managing occupational health and research councils funding further research into health and wellbeing. My freelance work has included projects around urbanisation, corporate social responsibilities, consumer profiling and health promotion initiatives.

## Career challenges

Finding opportunities that support the professional development of health psychologists, including access to funding, relevant CPD and training programmes.

## What interested you in health psychology?

The opportunity it offers us to seek out and share the voices of those otherwise left unheard, enabling us to continuously improve services for the individuals who will benefit most from them.

## Future aspirations

To become a sexual health psychologist, contributing relevant experience and knowledge into further improving the provision and quality of equitable services at both local and national level. Engaging in research that contributes to an evidence-base that demonstrates the value and utility that health psychology has to offer across wider settings, encouraging our membership and trainees to do the same.

## Advice for students and trainees

Be confident and creative, don't wait for a 'health psychologist' post to come along, go out there and demonstrate your skill set. Always talk to as many different people as you can, seek out opportunities to share your knowledge and ideas with others. Publish your research, don't worry about whether you think it's good enough, somebody will learn something from it. Write down what inspired you to become a psychologist and then use it to make the big decisions. Engage with your peers on social media and at industry events, we have been there and are always happy to help.





## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc degree in psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and graduated in 2019. I then secured a place on the Doctorate in Health Psychology at GCU. I spent Stage 1 training on the doctorate in person centred therapy, and I am now in Stage 2 using cognitive behavioural therapy.

## Current role

I am a Trainee Health Psychologist studying full-time at GCU and have been working with clients who have experienced stroke. I am currently researching the experience of autistic adults accessing healthcare services. I hope to eventually provide recommendations for clinicians working with autistic adults and investigate how health psychology can support this population.

## Work experience

During my BSc, I volunteered in the NHS in hospital wards and as an Honorary Assistant Psychologist in a clinical health psychology service. All of these experiences led me to further my interest in both physical and mental health. I researched acute pain, just world beliefs and forgiveness for my undergraduate research project, and I realised that health psychology was the career for me.

## Career challenges

The main challenge I've encountered as a trainee is the lack of understanding of our role in professionals and the public. This also makes it difficult to gain placements and future jobs. The onus is on us to ensure we can effectively demonstrate our role and utility in psychology as health psychologists.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Health psychology combines my interest in physical health, mental health and healthcare services. I also developed chronic pain in my third year, and this created a long-term interest in the topic. I have observed many opportunities for health psychologists to intervene and unfortunately, they have not been available. I hope to make a real difference to people's lives and make health psychologists more accessible.

## Future aspirations

My main goals are to work within the NHS as a health psychologist to support clients and train healthcare professionals to communicate effectively with autistic people. I'd love to teach trainee psychologists and continue my work in autism to improve people's lives.

## Advice for students and trainees

Imposter syndrome affects us all. Speak to others on the course and network! All of this helps build your confidence and makes you realise that many people are experiencing the similar struggles. It's a balancing act, and a good support network is absolutely needed. You can do this!

**Route two**



### Health psychology training

I went to the University of Sheffield in 2011 to do a degree in psychology and I loved the health psychology and behaviour change content that was covered, so I applied to study Health Psychology (MSc) at the University of Bath. In 2016 I started my PhD at the University of Nottingham and decided to embark upon the Stage 2 independent training route alongside my PhD.

### Current role

I currently work as a Research Fellow at the Centre of Evidence Based Dermatology, University of Nottingham working on research projects in eczema, vitiligo, hidradenitis suppurativa, and lichen sclerosus. I am also still working on some stage 2 competencies, so I am currently involved in a consultancy project developing patient materials supporting behaviour change for people with psoriatic arthritis, teaching and training healthcare professionals, and delivering psychological interventions for people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis in NHS secondary care.

### Work experience

My first toe dip into the world of health psychology was at the University of Manchester during university summer holidays getting involved in qualitative analysis of a project in psoriasis. Due to a wonderful experience, I then went back to Manchester to do my student placement when I was doing my Stage 1 training. Another early experience that gave me some useful skills was when I volunteered for the Stroke Association in the befriending service as well as at Know Your Blood Pressure awareness raising events.

### Career challenges

At times I feel like I am leading a double life, and not in a glamorous 007 kind of way! My identity as an applied dermatology researcher and as a trainee health psychologist sometimes feel removed from one another and I have found it hard to keep all plates spinning.

### What interested you in health psychology?

It starts a little personal. I was diagnosed with juvenile arthritis aged 16 and it tipped my world upside down. I was studying psychology at university when I found out about health psychology and I just felt something inside me tick. My own experiences meant I instantly understood what an important role health psychology could have, and I wanted to be a part of it.

### Future aspirations

I want to be a practitioner and academic psychologist. My aim is to improve the provision of psychological interventions for people with dermatological conditions, because I see so many unmet needs there. However, I remain open to life throwing me curveballs!

### Advice for students and trainees

Follow your interests but be open to new ideas and experiences – there are multiple ways to work in health psychology. Don't think you have to go it alone - reach out to your supervisor, other students, trainees and health psychologists. Most importantly, this isn't always an easy career pathway - be kind to yourself and take the time to celebrate your achievements (big and small).

# Dr Emma Kirkby-Geddes



## Health psychology training

I studied for my Masters in Health Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University and graduated in 2010. This led to a paid PhD studentship at Hallam working with Professor Ann Macaskill. I completed my PhD 2014. I enrolled on the BPS QHP Stage 2 Independent Route in April 2019.

## Current role

I continue my work with clients and am an ACT therapist and Mindfulness teacher, I work also for a health psychology consultancy on a range of programmes.

## Work experience

Health psychology a second career for me, having worked in the arts until having my children in my mid-30s. Early on in my studies, I was fortunate to get voluntary work, which turned into a paid position, working on a Public Health programme called 'Pathways to Health'. As a Project Manager I was able to work with delivery partners on a range of health interventions offered within community settings; including healthy eating and foot health! I also worked for the University of Huddersfield (Centre for Applied Health Research) with Professor Nigel King to evaluate the programme, leading to my first publication as lead author (Journal of Community Psychology). During my MSc I also worked as for the NHS as a Health Trainer and during my PhD studies, I gained further clinical experience as an Assistant Psychologist in Neuropsychology. I have my own consultancy and have worked extensively with the third sector to develop of interventions and programmes to support well-being in vulnerable older adults.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I have always been interested in the application of psychology to solve real world issues in health and in social care.

## Future aspirations

To continue to work as a health psychologist focusing on positive ageing and supporting the well-being of front line health and social care workers.

## Advice for students and trainees

Follow what interests you, as best you can. Work hard, be punctual and be reliable. Keep connected as studying can be lonely. I have found peer support to be a real tonic! The BPS trainee café is excellent for getting support and for connection with others.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University in 2018, followed by my MSc in Health Psychology at King's College London in 2018/19. I then secured a Research Assistant post at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). The post was also offering to provide a supervisor for completion of the BPS Stage 2 QHP, fully funded by Nuffield Health. I enrolled to start my training via the independent route in February 2020.

## Current role

I am currently a trainee health psychologist working as a Research Assistant at MMU. My main project is a partnership project between MMU and Nuffield Health, whereby I have been exploring the efficacy and the key delivery components of combined CBT and exercise interventions for people with anxiety and depression. Specifically, I have been researching whether the combined approach improves symptomatic experiences and increases physical activity. Following the completion of a systematic review and stakeholder interviews, myself and the research team are developing a new service pathway and will be piloting this in some of Nuffield Health's corporate sites.

As I am completing my Stage 2 competencies, I have also worked as a consultant on a project funded by the British Science Academy examining trust in science. Low trust in science can negatively influence people's attitudes, leading to behaviour changes such as refusing to vaccinate. I investigated the techniques used to undermine sound scientific evidence and worked to identify both barriers and solutions.

## Work experience

During my BSc, I volunteered as a workshop leader on a project called Head in the Clouds, which enabled me to work with primary school children across Sheffield, who were experiencing mental health issues that in some cases were triggered by trauma. The program enabled the delivery of workshops that integrated psychoeducation and

problem-solving skills to help promote positive behaviours and emotions. I was also able to complete a placement in the NHS at Guy's Hospital in the Dental Psychology Service. I created a practitioner manual based on the stepped care model, that incorporated low intensity treatment options for patients. The aim was to assess patients to determine if low intensity treatment options would be appropriate for them instead of being waitlisted for specialist treatment. The manual could be utilised by all practitioners in the dental department, subsequently reducing costs, waitlists, and the burden on the service.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I knew I wanted to pursue a career in psychology after I took it as an option during my A-levels but did not have a clue on which avenue in psychology I would go down. It was only when I took health psychology as an option in the final year of my undergraduate degree that I knew that this was the route in psychology I wanted to take, as it integrated my interests in health services as well as both physical and mental health.

## Future aspirations

I aspire to work as a practitioner health psychologist, in addition to offering consultancy services to help develop and deliver programmes that support health and wellbeing through the promotion of healthy behaviours.

## Advice for students and trainees

Take your time because there is no rush! There are many different pathways into health psychology, and you should refrain from comparing yourself to others. Take every opportunity to gain relevant experience and network with other professionals. You will get there eventually, whether it takes 2 years or 10. Just make sure to enjoy your journey.

# Dr Grant James McGeechan



## Health psychology training

I completed a BA in Social Sciences with Psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University in 2007. I went on to complete an MSc in Health Psychology at Stirling University. I then completed a PhD at Northumbria University before enrolling on my Stage 2 last year on the independent route.

## Work experience

When I was coming to the end of my PhD I stated a post-doc research assistant job at Newcastle University (later moved to Teesside University). As part of this role I worked on a series of evaluations of locally commissioned public health services. The role evolved over 4-years and I managed to work on a number of large, national RCTs looking at interventions to reduce alcohol use in young people.

## Current role

After four years I was appointed as a Lecturer in Health Psychology at Teesside University. I lead on a number of modules including Current Topics in Health Psychology and contribute to Qualitative Research Methods and Systematic Review Methods modules. I continue to contribute to a number of research projects, primarily in the area of cancer screening and survivorship. I also serve on the BPS North of England committee as co-editor of the jointly run North of England Bulletin.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I have always had an interest in how people think and what makes people behave in certain ways. I came to health psychology by chance as it was not something taught as part of my undergraduate course. One of my lecturers mentioned it in passing during a lecture and I went off to find out more about it. I got into psychology to help people live better lives and this sounded like a perfect opportunity.

## Future aspirations

I would like to continue contributing to the MSc Health Psychology. However, once I qualify, I would like to combine my academic role with a practical one as I feel both roles would complement each other perfectly.

## Advice for students and trainees

When doing any independent study – PhD, independent route – it is important to surround yourself with people who are in a similar situation. My colleagues got me through my PhD as much as my supervisors did, and I feel it will be the same for Stage 2! If you don't know anyone else, then social media, or virtual networks like this are a great place to meet people.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate BSc in Psychology (2010-2014) and MSc in Health Psychology (2014-2015) at the University of Stirling. In early 2020, I began my Stage 2 health psychology training with NHS Education for Scotland.

## Current role

I am currently a full-time Trainee Health Psychologist, based in the Public Health department with NHS Fife. My two areas of work are weight management and staff wellbeing. I have recently set up a weight management service for NHS staff which involves delivering 1:1 psychological interventions with overweight healthcare staff. I am also working on a variety of other group and distance-based behaviour change interventions to improve staff wellbeing. My research is focused on exploring overweight healthcare workers thoughts and experiences of engaging in physical activity and healthy eating behaviours. I also deliver teaching and training to NHS staff and MSc Health Psychology students.

## Work experience

After completing Stage 1 training I moved to Reading and started working with the Stroke Association as a Recovery Coordinator. During this time, I coordinated support and formal reviews to assess the holistic needs of stroke survivors and their carers. Following this I managed a Social Prescribing service in Slough, the main aim of which was to reduce unnecessary attendance in primary care. I then moved on to work as a Healthy Communities Manager, where I was responsible for developing and achieving Wokingham Borough Council's Annual Health and Wellbeing Plan. I led on implementing a local NHS Health Check programme and was responsible for securing funding and developing community programmes. This included the design and development of "Mums' Zone", which aims to improve new mums' mental and physical wellbeing through yoga and social support.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I remember attending a lecture on the perception of pain during the final year of my undergrad and something just clicked. I then began to explore health psychology and realised that this was the route I wanted to take.

## Future aspirations

At the moment I am really enjoying my clinical work, so I would love to work as an applied psychologist in some capacity. I also enjoy research, so my ideal job would be a combination of the two.

## Advice for students and trainees

Network with fellow trainee and qualified health psychologist, it will bring you so much inspiration and will increase your awareness of the variety of roles health psychologists can work in.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at the University of Portsmouth in 2008 and went on to complete my MSc in Health Psychology at the University of Bath in 2012. I started my PhD in 2018 at the University of Manchester, when I also enrolled as a trainee via the BPS independent Stage 2 route.

## Current role

I'm currently a full-time MRC-funded PhD Student and Trainee Health Psychologist at Manchester Centre for Health Psychology, which is based at the University of Manchester. My PhD is focused on developing a theoretical model to help us understand how and why pregnancy can act as a 'teachable moment' for women to change their health behaviour.

## Work experience

After finishing my MSc in 2012, I moved to London and started working at Queen Mary University London (QMUL) on a large clinical trial investigating breast cancer treatment. I started off working as a Research Administrator, which provided me with a foot-in-the-door in the world of research, and moved into a Clinical Research Associate role after a year. In 2015, I started working at University College London (UCL) on a project looking at ethnic disparities in uptake of the HPV vaccination. This was my first role working in health psychology research and the experience I gained during this time was invaluable.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I'm hugely interested in the way people's minds work and why we make the decisions we do. I'm also fascinated with healthcare, so health psychology is the perfect mix of interests! I loved my MSc and knew from the start I wanted a career in this field. I'm keen to develop my skills so that I can make a real impact and help people change their behaviour for the better.

## Future aspirations

I've love to work in an applied health psychologist role within the NHS, working to train health professionals in communication and behaviour

change. In an ideal world, I'd also like to combine this with a research role looking at health behaviour change during pregnancy, as there is still so much to understand.

## Advice for students and trainees

If you're completing your training via the independent route, try to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible that will help provide you with valuable experience and demonstrate your proficiency in the different training competencies.

Also, don't underestimate the value of peer support. Where possible, I'd suggest attending organised meetings run by the QHP or HPTN, and/or linking up with other trainees in whatever capacity you feel is appropriate. Being in contact with others who are doing the same training as you can be invaluable and a real source of help and reassurance throughout the process.





## Health Psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at St Mary's University in 2013 and went on to complete my part time MSc in Health Psychology at the University of Westminster, graduating in 2016. I started my PhD in Health Psychology, with Stage 2 training in 2019.

## Current role

I'm currently a full-time PhD Student and Trainee Health Psychologist at the University of Surrey. My PhD research aims to understand the impacts of Digital Twin technology and mobile health applications in changing health behaviours. I am also undertaking a placement at University College London's Centre for Behaviour Change and working on a consultancy project with the Health Psychology Exchange. I am also teaching undergraduate psychology students at the University of Surrey and collaborating with two fellow researchers on two systematic review projects.

## Work experience

After finishing my MSc, I worked as a Research Assistant at the Royal Surrey County Hospital for several months and then worked as a Study Coordinator at Moorfields Eye Hospital for one year. Both roles provided me with valuable knowledge and experience in conducting research in health settings. I have also taught a module in health psychology at Queen Mary University.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I find it interesting how different people can handle illness in many different and often unique ways. I thoroughly enjoyed my health psychology module during my BSc, and I loved every moment of MSc. I am extremely passionate about this field and I am excited to become part of it. I want to be able to help people in managing their illnesses.

## Future aspirations

To work as a health psychologist in the NHS, in delivering behaviour change interventions in promoting healthier lifestyles and try to find ways to encourage people to improve their health, such as helping people to lose weight or stop smoking.

## Advice for students and trainees

Make as many connections and take as many opportunities as you can! There is lots of help out there. I have found the more I reach out to people, the more connections I make and the more experience I gain in developing myself as a professional. Build your LinkedIn profile, follow other psychologists on Twitter, do not hesitate to contact anyone for advice! People are more than happy to give it as they were in your position once.

# Daniella Watson



## Health psychology training

I studied BSc Psychology at the University of Southampton in 2015, swiftly followed by MSc Health Psychology at the University of Bath in 2016. I started my PhD in Jan 2019, which is when I started to apply for the BPS QHP (Independent Route), which officially started in August 2019.

## Current role

I am a full-time Research Assistant and part-time PhD student and Trainee Health Psychologist researching maternal and child nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa at the University of Southampton. During the pandemic I have been leading the qualitative evaluation of the COVID-19 saliva testing programme and supporting PPIE activities on Human Challenge Studies, as well as volunteering as a consultant with the Health Psychology Exchange supporting organisations with their COVID-19 response. I am also a trained MECC-Healthy Conversations Skills facilitator and a policy associate at Public Policy Southampton.

## Work experience

During my undergraduate degree I undertook a placement at the MRC Lifecourse Epidemiology Unit (more details below). After my masters I worked for a charity in London who support dementia research and managed private hospitals and care homes. After this role, I volunteered as a Team Leader with an NGO in a rural village in Rajasthan, India working on health, education and social projects. I also volunteered in the US Virgin Islands after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. I then returned to my BSc supervisors to undertake a summer placement in 2018 and never left.

## What interested you in health psychology?

In the summer between second and third year of my undergraduate, I interned with Dr Wendy Lawrence and Prof Mary Barker at the MRC Lifecourse Epidemiology Unit, who were the first psychologists I had met working within

health. During this placement, which also led to my third-year dissertation, they trained me to conduct qualitative interviews with pregnant women taking part in a clinical trial. This firstly taught me the power of qualitative methods to learn about people's health experiences, and also how important it is to engage and explore participants' acceptability of an intervention. The multi-disciplinary team based in the Faculty of Medicine felt fitting as I was able to match up my interest in biology and medicine.

## Future aspirations

Become a global health psychologist.

## Advice for students and trainees

Get involved with as many projects, networks and events as possible. Meet as many people as you can and learn something from everyone.

# Newly qualified

(within one year of qualifying)



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc Psychology at Staffordshire University in 2014 and MSc Health Psychology a year later at Aston University. I started my Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at the University of West of England (UWE, Bristol) in 2016, and qualified in 2021.

## Work experience

After finishing my MSc, I was employed within the Public Health department of City of Wolverhampton Council as a Research Assistant. Working within public health made me realise how similar public health is to health psychology. Over the years, I have applied health psychology in public health roles such as workplace health, physical activity, wellbeing and health improvement and promotion. I am a keen publisher and throughout my doctorate training I have published several research articles.

## Current role

Currently I work within the City of Wolverhampton Council's Public Health department where I apply health psychology to support public health priorities. Recently, I have applied behaviour change within our COVID-19 response in areas such as communication and engaging the community to support COVID messages. I have recently worked with health psychologists across the UK as part of supporting the BPS COVID-19 workstream of Behaviour Change and Disease Prevention and supporting the Health Psychology Exchange in developing guidance on tackling COVID health behaviours. I am also a regular reviewer for Public Health and BMC Public Health journals.

## Career challenges

Health psychologist jobs are not really advertised and as trainees we have to be innovative with job roles to meet the required competencies. Struggling to meet some competencies made me realise the type of health psychologist I wanted to be, and I ensured that my experience was reflective of applying health psychology.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I have always been interested in why people do what they do. I love that health psychology is so diverse and this is what particularly interests me.

## Future aspirations

My ambition has always been to work as a health psychologist in public health and highlight the importance of health psychology.

## Advice for students and trainees

Network with as many health psychologists as possible to make you realise how diverse health psychology is. This will make it easier to meet competencies especially when you are struggling to meet them. Be completely honest with your supervisor. They are there to support you so if you are facing any issues talk to them.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Dundee in 2015 and then completed my MSc (Stage 1) at the University of St. Andrews in 2017. I then went on to be one of the first to complete the new DPsych Health Psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University in 2020, which encompassed Stage 1, Stage 2 and over 400 hours of clinical therapy training.

## Current role

Post-qualification, I have started a new role working clinically as a health psychologist in a multidisciplinary pain management service where I manage a caseload of patients with persistent pain and complex physical health needs. I have also been remotely tutoring undergraduate psychology students during the pandemic.

## Work experience

I have long history of working in social care throughout all of three my degrees, specifically in autism. As I moved toward traineeship, I began working clinically in the charity sector with patients following a stroke. From this I have worked in weight management and pain management services in the NHS: delivering therapy, conducting research, and contributing to service development. My experience has been moulded by multidisciplinary teams and is where I feel most comfortable.

## Career challenges

As my training is so novel, one challenge has been to explain my therapeutic skills in every MDT interaction, job interview and application. Hopefully, this landscape will begin to change as more health psychologists harness their therapeutic potential.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I became interested in health psychology while searching for Masters degrees. I've always been interested in both mental and physical health and the interaction between the two. Every course I researched presented a narrow, individualist view of mental health. Whereas the integration of society, people, medicine, behaviour and

psychological health in health psychology better fit with my view of the world.

## Future aspirations

As I work clinically in pain management, I would like to keep all my health psychology skills up to date by continuing to research service outcomes and contribute to service development. Ideally, I would integrate service development, research, and clinical work to aid the provision of the best patient care.

## Advice for students and trainees

Tailor your training to your interests, it makes it much easier to engage with. Also, if you can, tie the elements of training together. For example: my systematic review looked at quality of life in obesity, I worked clinically in weight management services and consulted on poorly attended weight maintenance groups. This made the reading, skills, knowledge and experience transferable in many cases.



## Health psychology training

I did my undergrad in Psychology & Sociology at University of Limerick in Ireland and then my MSc at the University of Aberdeen. I completed my Stage 2 training through NHS Education for Scotland at The State Hospital in February 2020. The hospital is one of four high-secure mental health hospitals in the UK and is located in South Lanarkshire, Scotland. My work focused mainly on weight management and uptake of physical activity for patients with severe mental illness and intellectual disability. It was an incredibly rewarding job and I had the opportunity to work with amazing clinical psychologists, dieticians, occupational therapists and nurse practitioners which was a great way to learn and share knowledge and ideas.

## Current role

I am working as a post-doctoral researcher for Teagasc in Galway, Ireland on a collaborative project with Queens University Belfast. Teagasc is the semi-state authority in the Republic of Ireland responsible for research and development, training and advisory services in the agri-food sector. A little different from my trainee role! I am leading the development of a behaviour change intervention to target farmers' use of antibiotics on farms on the island of Ireland. The intervention will involve teaching farm advisors to use behaviour change techniques and training vets in motivational interviewing so that they can effectively collaborate with their clients, improve awareness of antimicrobial resistance and increase farmers' motivation to make changes to their antibiotic use. As well as working for Teagasc, I'm currently doing some consultancy work for University College Dublin's veterinary school on farmers' attitudes and knowledge of anthelmintic resistance.

## Work experience

Before starting my MSc in Health Psychology I was an English language teacher in Spain, South Korea, Italy and Ireland. This gave me experience working and communicating with people which I found really helpful during my training, particularly

when teaching or delivering group and 1:1 interventions.

## What interested you in health psychology?

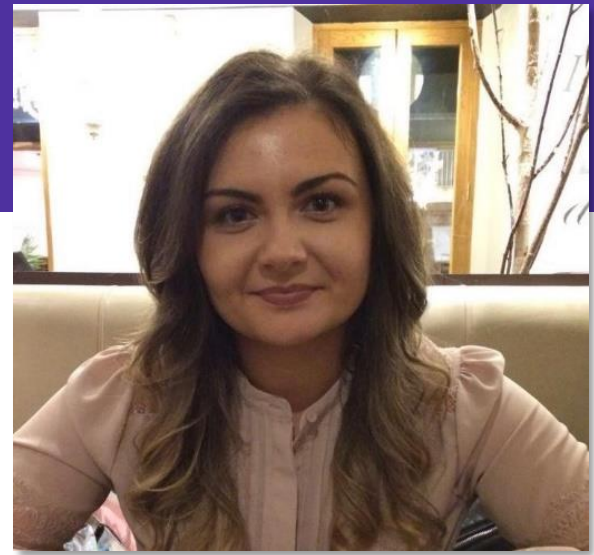
I took a health psychology class during my undergrad when I studied in Canada for a semester. Our lecturer was involved in a study which examined the impact of social support on cancer patients' recovery rates and just remember thinking 'that is amazing!'

## Future aspirations

I really enjoy sharing my knowledge of health psychology with other disciplines and want to continue promoting the role of a health psychologist as a practitioner and researcher in the future.

## Advice for students and trainees

Don't be afraid to reach out and make contacts. Health psychologists are a particularly friendly bunch! Embrace working with psychologists from other specialities and other professions to show how health psychologists can provide unique input into patient care and intervention development.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Glasgow in 2014. I then entered the DPpsych in Health Psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University as part of the first cohort in 2017. Within this programme I completed my Stage 1 and 2 training, and delivered over 400 hours of clinical practice in therapeutic approaches including person-centred therapy and CBT in a variety of applied settings.

## Current role

I am currently working remotely as an academic tutor in psychology and about to commence a more practice-based role involving assessing couples for relationship counselling.

## Work experience

I have extensive experience of working in the third sector across both voluntary and paid roles, including working as a counselling appointments co-ordinator, support worker for adults with autism and as a volunteer for children and families impacted by life limiting illness. During my Stage 1 training I worked therapeutically with individuals bereaved by terminal illness in a hospice setting. Over the course of my Stage 2 training, I worked clinically with individuals and families affected by cancer, MS and bereavement. I also worked within the NHS as part of a multi-disciplinary team in dietetics to deliver clinical, one-to-one interventions in bariatric surgery.

## Career challenges

Health psychologists' ability to work in clinical practice is frequently misunderstood, subsequently they are less often employed in clinical health settings due to perceived lack of clinical skills. It can be frustrating to not see these posts advertised for health psychologists despite knowing my training has equipped me with the appropriate assessment and formulation skills and therapeutic experience. I often spend a lot of time during my job application processes explaining the extent of clinical work I have conducted as part of my training and how I can demonstrate the appropriate competencies. Despite my frustrations I am very optimistic that this will

increasingly change as health psychologists experienced in clinical skills become increasingly prominent.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Following personal experiences with bereavement, cancer, and poor healthcare communication I wanted my career in psychology to revolve around how to better understand these concepts and support others' experiences. Therefore, finding the course at GCU and its emphasis on therapeutic and clinical intervention work came at the right time for me.

## Future aspirations

I would love to be working clinically both in private practice and in a clinical health psychology service in the NHS. I have a particular desire to return to bariatric surgery and weight management as it's an area of health improvement where the whole systems approach of health psychology can really make a difference.

## Advice for students and trainees

Look for opportunities aligned to your interests and passions – it will be much more rewarding that way and you will meet more likeminded people. There's no right or wrong way to do things – one of the wonderful things about health psychology is that no two journeys are the same. If you are looking to work in clinical practice, be aware of the challenges you may face but don't forget you will learn a variety of transferrable skills along the way. Networking is a fantastic resource, reach out to others and ask questions – the health psychology community is an extremely friendly one – academic twitter is a great place to start.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at Leeds Beckett University from 2008-2011 followed by a masters in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at Hull University in 2015. Following this I undertook a Low Intensity Psychological Therapies post graduate certificate while working within the local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service providing low intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapies to clients with mild to moderate mental health conditions. To become a chartered health psychologist I enrolled on the Stage 2 Qualification in Health Psychology in 2018 via the independent route with the British Psychological Society.

## Current role

My current role is within Adult Social Care as a Project Manager for the maximising independence workstream of a large-scale change programme. This involves working with front line adult social care teams to adopt strength-based practice and maximise the independence of clients to prevent, reduce or delay the need for formal care. To achieve this I provide behavioural science training to teams and establish peer reflection sessions to embed this change into everyday practice. Utilising health psychology theory and evidence throughout helps facilitate behaviour change within health and social care professionals practice.

## Work experience

When I began my health psychology training I was working as a Health Trainer for the NHS providing one-to-one and group behaviour change support to individuals embarking on a lifestyle change. Progressing to senior health trainer following Stage 1 training, I then qualified as a Smoking Cessation Practitioner delivering one-to-one and group behaviour change support to clients wanting to quit smoking alongside prescribing appropriate pharmacotherapy. I then secured a role in the local IAPT service as a trainee Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP) for a year and then as a qualified PWP. While undertaking my Stage 2 training I identified a need to develop my knowledge and skills within the use of data to inform policy, strategy and intervention development. To develop in this area I gained a Senior Analyst role within the local authority

Business Intelligence Team in which I gathered, analysed and presented data to various services, including public health, to inform strategic decision making.

## Career challenges

I have undertaken many roles in which health psychology is extremely helpful but not the traditional discipline. Applying health psychology to these areas is tricky as it involves advocating for the discipline and using the skills of a psychologist to encourage the take up of health psychology theory and practice. Undertaking Stage 2 training in an area with few health psychologists can be tough as it reduces the opportunity to reflect with and learn from other professionals in my area.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Prior to my Stage 1 training my brother had an accident resulting several traumatic injuries culminating in a leg amputation. A year following the amputation my brother was walking, surfing and snowboarding. He then travelled the world and became a helicopter pilot, a scuba diving instructor and an English teacher. I was inspired by my brother's approach to recovery and his ability to adapt to a life changing event and intrigued by how recovery can be so different for different people.

## Future aspirations

Now I have qualified I would like to move back to a clinical setting in which I can use health psychology knowledge to support others recovering from physical health conditions.

## Advice for students and trainees

Connect with other professionals as much as possible. Being part of a clinical network was invaluable during my training. It will give you practical help but also much support from others who have been there! Good Luck :)





## Health psychology training

MSc in Health Psychology from the University of the West of England 2011-2012.

Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology from the University of the West of England 2016 – 2020.

## Current role

Behavioural Science Team Leader for Public Health England's (PHE) COVID-19 Behavioural Science and Insights Unit which sits within PHE's Emergency Response Department.

## Work experience

I started working for PHE in 2014 as a research assistant. Over the years I have supported and lead a number of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies mostly on the topic of antimicrobial resistance and common infections. For example, I conducted a qualitative study exploring the perceptions of community pharmacists and their staff towards antimicrobial stewardship in community pharmacy.

More recently I have led a qualitative study exploring the experiences of individuals from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the view of making intervention recommendations for these groups. In my new role as a Behavioural Science Team Leader I provide behavioural science support to help regions with their COVID-19 response. For example, in helping plan community engagement work, commenting on resources, designing studies or evaluating existing interventions.

## Career challenges

One of the difficulties I faced when I started working for PHE was understanding antimicrobial resistance and all of the microbiological terminologies. I definitely experienced imposter syndrome and often had to remind myself that behaviour change principles are key to antimicrobial stewardship.

It took a while for me to gain confidence in discussing resistance, antibiotic treatments and the various bacteria but I got there in the end by doing a lot of reading and listening during meetings.

## What interested you in health psychology?

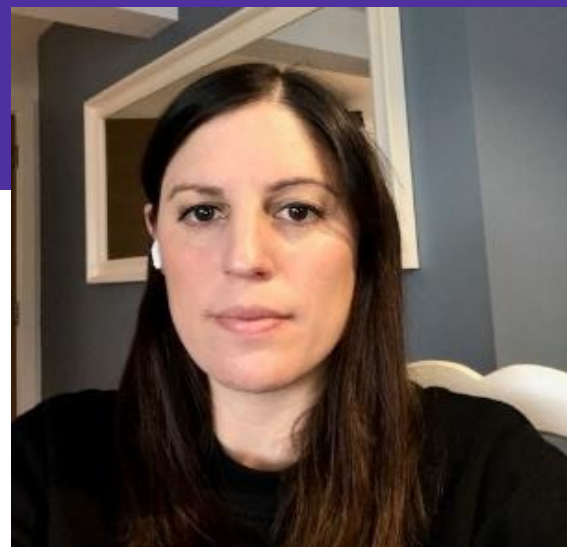
For me it combined my interests in science and health along with my curiosity for wanting to understand human behaviour. I'm not sure what career I would have taken if I had not gone down the health psychology route.

## Future aspirations

I want to continue along the same trajectory and become an expert of behavioural science in public health. From what I have seen there is a huge role for more behavioural scientists to get involved nationally and regionally across all public health priorities.

## Advice for students and trainees

Training will be over before you know it, so you must enjoy the process and take every opportunity that is thrown your way.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at Bournemouth University in 2005 and completed my MSc in Health Psychology in 2011 at Middlesex university in London. I started my part time Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology in 2014 at the University of the West of England (UWE) and qualified in March 2021.

## Current role

I currently work for University of Reading as a Teaching Fellow. I really enjoy being an academic tutor- where I get to support the students with their academic, professional and personal goals. I am involved with supporting the development of undergraduate psychology modules and delivering high standards of teaching in various modules. I have been very impressed with University of Reading Psychology department. Everyone has a real passion for teaching excellence, and I have been made to feel very welcome and supported.

## Work experience

After completing my MSc, I took up a role in London as a Health Trainer in the NHS; I worked with individuals to make lifestyle changes to benefit their health. Alongside the NHS Health Trainer role, I took up a part time role as an Assistant Psychologist for SCCH Health Psychology Consulting, where I supported the business with co-ordinating the 2nd Applied Health Psychology Network and Careers event.

In 2016 I started co-ordinating programmes in the NHS; for people living with long term health conditions. I was later promoted to Service manager. At the same time as working in the NHS I did some lecturing work for MSc Health Psychology students at Middlesex university, I also helped organise the placements.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Being able to support others to make positive changes to their health. The diversity of career options.

## Future aspirations

I am aiming to secure a lectureship in psychology.

## Advice for students and trainees

Network and take every opportunity you can to further enhance your skill set. Do not worry if you are not sure exactly where you want to work in health psychology when you first start studying. The more opportunities you take up - the clearer your goals will become.

**2 to 5 years**



## Health psychology training

I graduated from the University of Dundee BSc. (Hons) Psychology course in 2014 and University of St. Andrews MSc Health Psychology course in 2015. My Stage 2 Health Psychology training was through the NHS Education for Scotland Trainee Health Psychologists scheme, and I became a HCPC registered and BPS chartered health psychologist in 2018.

## Current role

In January 2021 I started a new role as a Respiratory Highly Specialist Health Psychologist at CNWL/Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust. This role is split between the National Centre for Airway Reconstruction and Grenfell community. I am excited by the opportunity to use the breadth of Health Psychology competencies within NHS contexts. For the Airway Reconstruction role, working closely with a multi-disciplinary team to enhance the psychologically informed nature of provision is key through individual interventions, case consultations, service development and research amongst other areas. For the community role, conducting psychological interventions with people experiencing physical health difficulties is key.

## Work experience

Pre-qualification to fund my studies I conducted a range of roles (e.g., Domestic Assistant/Porter, Letting Assistant). Post-Stage 2 I was employed as a Health Psychologist within Hywel Dda University Health Board conducting psychological interventions with people with cardiac, respiratory and diabetic conditions. I was then employed as a Senior Research Fellow within Prof. Susan Michie's UCL Centre for Behaviour Change group, applying Health Psychology principles within Health Protection research. I was subsequently employed as the Adult Cystic Fibrosis Psychology Lead on a fixed-term basis at King's College London NHS Foundation Trust.

## Career challenges

Pursuing a career as a health psychologist within the NHS can be challenging. The breadth of settings and experiences of people conducting the Stage 2 qualification means that the health psychology community is an enthusiastic group with diverse interests and areas of expertise. However, this means that health psychologists may sometimes be overlooked for practitioner roles due to misconceptions about what health psychologists 'can' and 'cannot' do. Working within the NHS with supportive supervisors has helped me gain confidence in seeing the unique skills and expertise that health psychologists can contribute and conveying this to others.

## Advice for students and trainees

If you are passionate about a career in the NHS follow your goal and try to tailor your work, voluntary and personal experience towards this. Think about what you specifically as a person and health psychology can bring, and celebrate your difference with other professionals who may be going for the same role. You may have times where you are not invited to interview, but stick with it and focus on organisations and supervisors who will support your growth as a professional and a person.



## Health psychology training

After studying my undergraduate psychology degree from 2005-2009, I was a support worker with people with learning disabilities and volunteered on research projects as well. I then did my MSc in Health Psychology in 2011-2012 and was interested in how it applied to my work with people with learning disabilities in social care. I subsequently built professional relationships within this social care organisation and it became my placement setting for my professional doctorate. After I finished my training in 2018, I became a Long Term Conditions Lead in an IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) service, which is my current role.

## Current role

I design, pilot and deliver clinical interventions for adults with a range of long-term conditions in primary care to help people understand them and manage psychological difficulties they may also be experiencing concurrently. I also train other staff on how to deliver therapeutic interventions with people with chronic illness more effectively.

Highlights so far have been learning to apply health psychology theory and evidence based approaches to understanding the needs of and helping to improve health equity amongst marginalized communities, an area I have ongoing involvement in.

I have enjoyed meeting many brilliant and lovely people in the health psychology community as I have progressed.

## Career challenges

Graduating in an economic recession meant I faced difficulties in finding graduate roles and funding further training, but I was also fortunate to have support and encouragement from my family, enabling me to persevere with my career path. I also found navigating health psychology careers confusing and was fortunate to receive informal guidance from those already in the field to help me decide what further training to take. Thankfully

there are more resources for aspiring health psychologists now!

## Advice for students and trainees

Keep one professional activity or project which ties in closely with your interests and passions, this can help you to keep going when it is tough. Connect with others working in different areas, it can be really interesting, mutually supportive and lead to collaboration. Don't lose sight of the bigger picture, including why your work matters and where it is situated in a wider context. And don't take on everything, progress is like a patchwork quilt; change takes time, perseverance and coordination. And finally, achievement can be messy sometimes, but that is okay. It does not have to be perfect to count.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at Solent University, Southampton in 2005 and went on to complete my MSc in Health Psychology at the University of Southampton in 2007. I completed my Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at the University of the West of England in 2017.

## Current role

Currently, I hold a research fellow post based in Clinical Ethics and Law (CELS) in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Southampton where I am researching ethical and legal issues in genetic and genomic medicine. I have a broad portfolio of research projects I am involved in: a Health Education England funded study developing the content for an online behaviour change intervention to make it more likely patients share genetic health information with their at-risk relatives; a study working with participants from the 100,000 Genomes Project exploring their experiences of participating; an ESRC-funded project exploring decision making in predictive and prenatal genetic testing; and a Wellcome Trust funded project exploring the ethical preparedness relating to whole genome sequencing.

## Work experience

After completing my MSc, I took up a Research Associate position at University College London on a project looking at the feasibility of pharmacies offering computerised tailored advice to aid in smoking cessation. In 2008, I started working as a Specialist Smoking Cessation Advisor within the Health Promotion Service at Solent NHS Trust. During the Professional Doctorate, as well as working in Health Promotion, I also worked in the Clinical Genetics Department at University Hospital Southampton as a qualitative researcher exploring what it is like to live with a rare genetic condition. Part of this research formed the basis of my thesis for the Professional Doctorate.

## Career challenges

Before I started the Professional Doctorate in 2017, I did embark on a year or two via the independent route whilst working in my health promotion position. Personally, I found the independent route challenging and quite lonely and was so grateful for the cohort I studied with on the Professional Doctorate.

## Advice for students and trainees

I've found that some funding streams are not open to me because I do not have a PhD, for example, the NIHR Advanced Fellowship. I would advise anyone contemplating their next steps after their MSc to seek out an opportunity to combine Stage 2 and a PhD.



## Health psychology training

I completed a BSc Psychology at City, University of London (UoL) in 2009 and an MSc Health Psychology at University College London and King's College London in 2011. I did a Professional Doctorate at City, UoL in Health Psychology from 2014 to 2018, whilst employed in public health as an Evaluation and Qualitative Research Specialist.

## Current role

I have a few different but complementary roles, allowing me to learn from and share good practice with others. My main role is as a Public Health Lead within health improvement at Surrey County Council. I design, implement and monitor public health programmes and services e.g., weight management services. I also lead multi-agency and partnership networks and work across a range of health and prevention issues. Alongside this, I'm an Assistant Editor at the Behavioural Science in Public Health Network (BSPHN), involving writing and peer reviewing articles highlighting behavioural science principles applied in public health settings. I also create and distribute the online publication. Finally, I am a Visiting Lecturer at City, UoL and Arden University, teaching a range of topics such as psychology, research methods and public health.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I always knew I wanted a career where I could help people to live healthy and happy lives. To me, public health and health psychology are the perfect match, offering the opportunity to practically apply health psychology principles to affect the health of the population on a large scale.

## Future aspirations

I love the applied nature of my role and would like to progress further in public health, specifically gaining regional experience. I enjoy teaching (and hopefully inspiring!) students and love the flexible nature of visiting lecturing, so I will endeavour to continue with teaching opportunities. I would like

to pursue health psychology consultancy, especially abroad where the fields of health psychology and behavioural science are under-developed.

## Advice for students and trainees

Don't be afraid to reach out to people, especially in the early stages of training. Speak to other health psychologists / colleagues about the journey they took into their profession. Be creative when searching for jobs and opportunities – roles using the skills and knowledge that health psychologists have come up in different sectors but are rarely advertised as 'health psychologist' posts. Once you research the role further, you may find you're ideally placed for it!



## Health psychology training

After a whimsical decision to do a part-time conversion degree in psychology at the age of 49, I 'discovered' health psychology. I then did a MSc in Health Psychology at King's College London where my dissertation was supervised by Professor John Weinman. Later, I worked with John in medication adherence. After a couple of years, I decided to pursue a part-time Professional Doctorate at Staffordshire University and qualified when I was 60.

## Current role

As a sole practitioner, I work with NHS patients through a musculoskeletal provider. It's a brief three-session service which required me to adapt assessment and interventions appropriate to this. I work privately with clients who have a variety of physical health challenges, usually involving about six sessions. I also coach medical consultants at a large London hospital trust. Much of my work is in consultancy practice (I was a business consultant in my previous life), and I occasionally hire health psychologist associates to work with me. I am a clinical advisor to a health charity and a member of an All-Party Parliamentary Group on haemochromatosis, the most common genetic condition in people of northern European descent.

## Work experience

Early work experience was voluntary in an acute stroke service – where no health psychologist had previously dared to tread, apparently! Gradually, the team realised what health psychology could offer in terms of addressing patients' concerns and worries, beliefs about stroke, engagement with rehabilitation, and ongoing management of health. That remains the most fulfilling role I have ever had. My first paid role in health psychology was as an internal consultant designing a population-level support intervention for carers of people with Alzheimer's disease, followed by a service lead role for smoking cessation at the Royal Free (I loved it). However, as I was interested in more complex clinical work, I moved into a pain management role in secondary care delivering individual and group interventions. When I finally qualified, I decided to work independently as a consultant and clinician.

## Career challenges

Entering a new profession late in life means I have less time left than others to practice. On the other hand, my professional skills over 40 years and my life experiences are valuable in my work. The biggest challenges have been finding a good health psychology practitioner-supervisor and, working as a sole practitioner can be lonely and amplifies imposter syndrome. Initially, the biggest challenge was getting access to clinical work due to limiting job adverts.

## Advice for students and trainees

Not sure I can advise others, but this is advice to my younger self. Choose your route carefully. Find an academic/stage 2 supervisor who is genuinely interested in your work and discuss early on how best you can work together. Value your prior achievements even if other do not appear to. Recognise and accept that postgraduate study happens when life throws you extra special curve balls. Take opportunities to learn new skills and don't take on more than you can fully commit to. Be guided by your values. Resist any temptation to compare yourself to others – ask for their wisdom and support. Persist in seeking your professional tribe.





## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology, MRes, and PhD in Health Psychology at the University of Manchester, then completed my Stage 1 at Liverpool John Moores University, and enrolled on the QHP Stage 2 during my post-doctoral research position also at the University of Manchester. I continued with and completed my QHP Stage 2 as a Lecturer at the University of Liverpool.

## Current role

As a Lecturer I deliver research and teaching activities in applying third wave therapies and behaviour change science to weight-related behaviour change and obesity management. I also provide one-to-one support for people living with long-term conditions or trying to change health-related behaviours as an independent practitioner.

## Work experience

I worked as a Research Associate on an NIHR programme grant looking at the role of cardiovascular disease, behaviour change and health professional training in the context of psoriasis. I had other short-term research positions in antibiotic prescribing for respiratory tract infections, and exploring effective behaviour change techniques in physical activity interventions. During Stage 2 training I worked as a Trainee Practitioner delivering behaviour change support to people with psoriasis in the NHS.

## Future aspirations

I would like to continue to grow in my role as an independent practitioner and bring health psychology research and practice closer together. Ultimately I want to progress understanding about how best to help people succeed with changing challenging health-related behaviours. I would also like to actively encourage and support trainees early in their careers to pursue health psychology career paths.

## What interested you in health psychology?

My Dad lived with and died from a long-term condition spending lots of time with doctors and in hospital when I was young, when I learned about clinical communication as a topic in my third year of my BSc Psychology I found myself wondering how Dr-patient communication might have impacted on my Dad's condition and experiences in health care. I have also always wanted to better understand why humans tend to engage in behaviours that might do us more harm than good, health psychology has certainly provided me with many many answers to this question!

## Advice for students and trainees

Talk to qualified health psychologists about what they do, you will discover a host of interesting roles and job opportunities that you likely wouldn't have heard of. Also, attend health psychology conferences and follow inspiring health psychologists on Twitter and Instagram.



## Health psychology training

I completed the BPS QHP Stage 2 qualification through NHS Education for Scotland which included a funded two-year placement in the NHS. This included developing and delivering a novel health psychology service, including delivery of training, one-to-one and group interventions and research in health, social care and third sector.

## Current role

I am currently seconded into the Principal Educator for Health Improvement position in NHS Education for Scotland. I lead on the delivery of a national behaviour change training programme in Scotland and I am involved in strategic planning on other training and resources for a wide variety of health and social care staff.

## Work experience

After completion of my training, I worked as a Principal Health Psychologist in a variety of psychology, mental health services and social care services providing one-to-one health psychology interventions as well as consultancy in rehabilitation, older adults and social prescribing. I also provided supervision of trainees and qualified health and other applied psychologists within the NHS.

## Career challenges

It can be tricky to gain influence at higher level within an applied setting, however if you can show the benefit of your work in terms of outcomes for people, staff or services (importance of rigorous evaluation) then this often opens new doors and new opportunities.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Initially it was about having the opportunity to support healthcare staff to gain a psychological perspective in their roles. However since working as a health psychologist it's been much more about working with people to support them to make changes that otherwise might have been difficult. This could be a patient feeling confident in using their walking aid to get out the house rather than staying in all day, a healthcare professional using their knowledge of motivation to continue

supporting a client rather than discharging them or a cultural systemic shift in a service. All of which makes me excited to be a health psychologist that we get to work in all these areas.

## Future aspirations

The delivery of training and educational packages for applied health psychologists in practitioner skills for complex consultancy and interventions. As well as supervision skills. All of which hopefully give a greater platform for career progression within applied settings for our future health psychologists.

## Advice for students and trainees

Know your skill set and what you can offer (we can offer a lot!) and sell yourself every day!



## Health psychology training

I did my BSc and MSc Health Psychology at Staffordshire University (2002), a PhD at the University of Leicester followed by the BPS Stage 2 independent route to learn practitioner skills.

## Current role

I work in the School of Psychology, University of Derby as programme director of the online MSc Health Psychology. I teach research and professional skills in health psychology. My current research is in the psychobiology of stress and testing interventions. I run an NHS Health Psychology clinic one day a week at University Hospitals Leicester, supporting patients with cardiovascular disease management.

## Work experience

My career started with research roles at UCL/NHS Enfield & Haringey and Loughborough University before I took a research associate role and PhD, which involved evaluating the newly established integrated diabetes care clinics. This gave me insight into the potential role health psychology could play in multidisciplinary specialist care teams.

## Career challenges

Coming from a mostly academic skill set, developing applied health psychology clinical skills was a new challenge, which I am now passionate about and want to help open up practitioner opportunities. My research-practice work is embedded in my teaching and I've been involved in developing two health psychology practice resources; 1) as sub editor of the Health Psychology Update section on practice, consultancy and training for other health psychologists and trainees to share and get ideas for their work. 2) Head Editor for the European Health Psychology Society's Practical Health Psychology blog to promote the use of health psychology research in practice. There are research informed practical tips on topics such as forming habits, goal setting and encouraging physical activity ([www.practicalhealthpsychology.com](http://www.practicalhealthpsychology.com))

## What interested you in health psychology?

Before I really knew what health psychology was, I was interested in studying medicine but became more drawn to the idea of using psychology in healthcare. I could see how important it was to use psychology to try to understand how people think, feel, and behave, and how this impacts on their health.

## Future aspirations

I really enjoy being a health psychology scientist-practitioner. My future will involve developing the health psychology service at UHL by demonstrating the value and impact of health psychology in terms of improved patient outcomes. I will also be focusing on creating and synthesising research that can be used in health psychology services.

## Advice for students and trainees

Be open minded and curious; look for ways to build on the opportunities that come your way. Also, go and actively look for opportunities and never be afraid to reach out to others who are working on something that interests you.



### Health psychology training

I completed my BSc Psychology and Criminology at Keele University in 2004, followed by my MSc Health Psychology at Staffordshire University in 2005. I then returned to Keele and completed my PhD in 2010 and after a short break from being a student, I completed the Doctorate in Health Psychology at Staffordshire University in 2018.

### Current role

I am a Senior Lecturer in Health Psychology at Staffordshire University where I am involved in running the MSc in Health Psychology. I also teach quantitative research methods and developmental psychology. My current research interests are in the area of breastfeeding.

### Work experience

I was lucky to be employed as a Graduate Teaching Assistant whilst completing my PhD. This was a great opportunity to develop my teaching skills and led to me being employed as a Teaching Fellow and completing a teaching qualification. I also worked as a Research Assistant on a project looking at humour styles in children, which led to my first publication.

### What interested you in health psychology?

As an undergraduate I became fascinated by the idea that people's beliefs and understandings of health and illness can impact on their physical health, their experience of and even their recovery from illness. I took an optional health psychology module and from then on knew that I wanted to be a health psychologist!

### Future aspirations

In the short term I hope to become more involved in teaching and supervision on the health psychology doctorate course. In the longer term, I aim to work as a practitioner health psychologist. I think a challenge for me will be gaining the required experience to move into this area.

### Advice for students and trainees

There are many different routes to becoming a health psychologist. I was able to use my role as a lecturer as the "placement" for completing my Stage 2 training. It meant I had to convince my manager that they needed another health psychologist and I needed to seek out opportunities to deliver more health psychology teaching (because I had initially been employed as maternity leave cover to teach developmental and social psychology!). My career plan when I was working on my Stage 1 certainly wasn't to do a PhD and a doctorate but for me this worked out very well. My advice would be to seek out opportunities and advocate for yourself so that you can achieve your goals.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at the University of Leeds in 2012 and my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at Staffordshire University in 2012-13. I started a PhD in 2014 and subsequently enrolled as a trainee on the BPS Stage 2 Qualification in Health Psychology between 2015 and 2018. I became HCPC-registered in 2018.

## Current role

Currently, I have a varied role which I love as it combines practice, teaching and training and research. I work as a lecturer in the Manchester Medical School where I am the MB ChB programme lead for Psychology. My role as a lecturer is very rewarding as I can see how our future doctors will be using psychology to inform their practice and conversations with patients. I also work at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust as a practitioner health psychologist where I work with nurse and doctor colleagues helping individuals with Inflammatory Bowel Disease adjust to and manage their long-term condition.

## Work experience

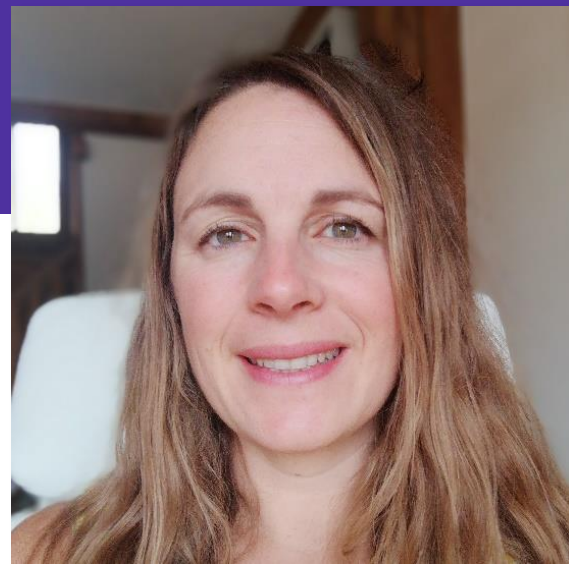
I have always been interested in physical activity and the psychology of health. During my BSc I gained lots of varied experiences working with different groups of people in health-related settings such as a summer camp for obese adolescents, care homes and schools (physical education). After completing my MSc, I gained experience in mental health working as a healthcare assistant at psychiatric units for adolescents, adults and the elderly where I worked for 12 months. Gaining experience in physical and mental health settings was invaluable and enabled me to make an informed decision to follow the health psychology route. Following my PhD, I worked as a Research Associate for 2 years where we focused on the barriers and facilitators to implementing evidence-based practice in community nursing.

## Career challenges

Working in teams and organisations which do not fully understand/misunderstand the role of a health psychologist is challenging. Whilst this can be very frustrating, it has helped me to develop my communication skills and confidence to explain what health psychologists do and what our skillset is (and we have so many skills!!). Another challenge is learning to say no. As health psychologists, we have so many desirable skills that a lot of colleagues approach us for help with projects/work and because it's all so interesting it can be difficult to say no and remember to look after our own health and wellbeing.

## Advice for students and trainees

Seeking opportunities and capitalising on those available to you will enable you to gain a wide variety of experiences and gain competence in a number of areas. Spend time meeting other health professionals, as well as health psychologists to learn more about the role of a multidisciplinary team and the different roles that health psychologists can do. Be confident in your skillset and what you can offer potential employers.



## Health psychology training

My first experience of studying psychology was when I took A Level Psychology, I went on to complete a psychology degree followed by MSc (Hons) Health Psychology (Stage 1 training) and then studied for my Doctorate in Health Psychology (Stage 2 training) at UWE, Bristol.

## Current role

I am Associate Professor in Health Psychology and Medical Education (Assessment) at Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia as well as working as a HCPC-registered Practitioner Psychologist (Health Psychologist) in Pain Management for my local NHS Trust.

## Work experience

It wasn't an easy, or linear, route to get to where I am today as health psychology training in England has unfortunately not been funded so I have always had to work to pay for the next part of my psychology training. I completed a PGCE soon after leaving university and gained QTLS status so I was able to work as a psychology teacher in Sixth Form College. I did this for 10 years and became Head of Department. Whilst teaching, I also trained teachers nationally on how to improve effectiveness of delivering A Level Psychology and was an A Level Examiner. Teaching funded my route to further psychology training. I secured a university lecturing position 8 years ago and completing my doctorate has enabled me to gain promotion within that post due to the opportunities it has opened up for me. Completing my doctorate has provided me with so many useful skills, allowed me to meet so many interesting and lovely people and has given me the confidence to publish research and engage in health psychology on a national level.

## Career challenges

The biggest career challenge for me has been trying to raise awareness of health psychology in the public sector, where in some parts of England, it is completely unheard of. Trying to prove myself as a health psychologist has been common as I am thought of as an 'unknown' by recruiters and

employers as I am not a clinical or counselling psychologist, whose roles and training pathways are traditionally well-understood.

## What interested you in health psychology?

Health psychology has always fascinated me, and still does, as it looks at individuals and their health experience in the most holistic way possible in order to help understand those unique experiences and inform the most appropriate ways to manage health and health behaviours. It is a very broad discipline and very exciting to be part of!

## Future aspirations

To complete more research, continue to participate in clinical work and teaching, as both are hugely rewarding, but to also try to raise the profile of health psychology further in order to open up more opportunities for health psychology trainees and graduates, as we have a lot to offer.

## Advice for students and trainees

Stick with what you are passionate about, work hard and eventually your opportunities will open up for you. Working in health psychology is extremely valuable to society as well as personally rewarding.

# Dr Fiona Marfleet



## Health psychology training

Msc and Prof Doc at UWE Bristol

Current role: Specialist Weight Management Service; Pain Management Service; Staff Governor for Allied Health Professionals.

## Work experience

3 years, specialist residential unit for individuals with a diagnosis of an eating disorder; 3 years, within a community mental health team (care coordination). Previous work – teaching (GCSE, A-level, HND and degree level); publishing

## Career challenges

Finding the right kind of experience to build my skill set to move into a practitioner psychologist role! I sought out mental health roles as they presented a different angle on health. There were always physical health aspects and typically social factors and it provided a lot of one-to-one contact with patients so proved to be a very powerful way of gaining a grounding in clinical work. There's occasionally some confusion around what we can do in a practitioner role – understanding your professional boundaries clearly is important in this respect.

## What interested you in health psychology?

This started when I was ill myself. The illness occurred very suddenly following a very difficult loss in my life. I landed in hospital. I knew that the challenges I was having with my recovery were linked to the loss but that wasn't mentioned at all by any health care professionals. I was separated from my family while in hospital – that made things harder. And the environment was so difficult – not a psychologically-informed environment or psychologically-informed care. I thought "surely we can do better than this". I looked into how psychology was used in health and here I am.

## Future aspirations

I'd like a balance of clinical work (one-to-one and group), service development and policy work. I'd like to contribute to improved links between research and practice.

## Advice for students and trainees

Health psychology is broad. I don't think it's possible to do everything we can do from our training, so I'd suggest trying to narrow down your focus in some way and then seeking out roles that will build your experience portfolio – be creative in this! There is sometimes some confusion around what HPs can do – gaining your own clarity is going to be key as with clarity you are in a stronger position to explain why you would be excellent for a role. I would also recommend linking in with other health psychologists - our networks are an incredible resource and we are a friendly encouraging bunch so use that resource!



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc (Hons) Psychology degree at the University of Glasgow in 2010. I then undertook my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at the University of St Andrews in 2010-11. I completed my Stage 2 training via the QHP independent route in the NHS Education for Scotland Trainee Health Psychologists scheme in 2017. I was awarded my PhD entitled: *The development of an intervention to support midwives in addressing multiple health behaviours with pregnant women*, from the University of Stirling in 2020.

## Current role

In July 2020 I began my role as a Careers Adviser within the University of St Andrews Careers Centre. Although this job is not directly within the field of health psychology, I am using many of the skills I developed during my Stage 2 training. I am enjoying my new career path immensely.

## Work experience

I have worked as an Assistant Psychologist within an NHS Paediatric Psychology Liaison Service. I have also worked as a Research Assistant and most recently as a Senior Health Promotion Officer.

## Career challenges

I think there can be a misconception that to have succeeded you have to be working in a job titled “health psychologist”. However, I am using many skills I developed during my Stage 2 training programme. For instance, I regularly teach students and consult with academic schools. I also apply practitioner techniques I developed during my Stage 2 training to provide guidance to students and academic staff.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I was initially interested in health psychology as I had undertaken a Clinical Health Psychology undergraduate dissertation project and wanted to further my knowledge and experience within the field. I also knew that it was a popular postgraduate study option for those considering applying to clinical psychology training which was a career option I was considering pursuing at that time.

## Future aspirations

I hope to have a long and successful career as a Higher Education Careers Adviser. Hopefully with lots of emphasis on supporting future health psychologists.

## Advice for students and trainees

Think carefully about what you want from your career. You spend a significant amount of time at work and you need to ensure the job you do is enjoyable. It is never too early to start planning your next career steps. One way to do this is to engage as much as possible with your university careers service.





### Health psychology training

My name is Ailish O'Brien and I am a Chartered Health Psychologist accredited by the Psychological Society of Ireland and a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. I completed my MSc in Counselling Psychology in Trinity College, Dublin, in 2004. I then set up a private practice in a primary care setting in 2005. At the same time, I began working part-time in the Child and Adolescent Psychology Department in my local Community Care Office, part of the Health Service Executive (Ireland). I was always interested in the biopsychosocial model of psychology so applied for, and was accepted on, the MSc in Health Psychology in Sheffield Hallam University in 2011. I completed this master's programme in 2013 and progressed to the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology programme in the University of the West of England in 2014 and completed my doctorate in 2018.

### Current role

I moved from the Health Service Executive in 2008 to work full time for National Learning Network, a not-for-profit organisation that offers a range of person-centred flexible training courses. These courses cater for people with learning difficulties, and people who need extra support transitioning into employment or on to further education.

My role in National Learning Network has four parts:

- 1) The first is to support students by providing them with psychoeducational services in areas such as anxiety management, healthy lifestyle choices, and relationships and sexuality.
- 2) The second part is to offer a consultancy service to staff.
- 3) The third is to engage in research to ensure we can offer an evidence-based practice service.
- 4) The fourth is to develop group policies and procedures to ensure that we are compliant with global best practice when working with vulnerable populations.

### Work experience

As you can see, I completed both my masters and doctorate in health psychology when working full time, while also maintaining a small private practice. I would not have been able to complete these programmes without the support and encouragement of staff in both of these universities. I enjoyed every part of my experiences in both places, the whole journey was a great adventure into the wonderful field of health psychology. Taking the biopsychosocial approach to understanding behaviour as promoted in health psychology has enabled me to take a holistic approach to working with people and this has been invaluable in my present role with National Learning Network, particularly in these times of great uncertainty.

### Advice to future students and trainees

My advice to anyone wanting to work in psychology is to think outside the box and delve into health psychology – health psychologists have proven their worth in these times of great uncertainty when public health has most needed the skills and knowledge that we have to offer.



### Health psychology training

I completed my BSc Psychology at the University of Liverpool in 2007 followed by the MSc Health Psychology in 2008 at University of Central Lancashire. I returned to University of Liverpool in 2008 as a Research Associate and worked in public health & policy for 7 years and then health services research for 4 years on a variety of research projects. Research included exploring the mental wellbeing of local community groups, the health needs of military veterans and homeless people, through to qualitative studies embedded in children's clinical trials exploring medicines used to stop seizures in children with epilepsy, steroid side effects in children with arthritis and measuring feeds in premature babies. During this time I completed the Stage 2 QHP through the BPS independent route, qualifying in 2016. I also completed a PhD exploring transitions, end of life care, and resilience. I also had my two children during this time, who are now 7 & 8.

### Current role

Two days a week I work clinically in the NHS as a health psychologist, as part of a psychology team commissioned into supporting a local Housing First programme. I support staff with clinical supervision, reflective practice, training, brief advice and contribute towards service development, supervision of DClin trainees and research. I also work with patients in the diabetes service, and run ACT groups for people with cardiovascular conditions.

During my other three days a week I am a Lecturer in Psychology, allowing me to continue to be research active, and I'm also the Programme Director of the MSc Health Psychology Online Programme at University of Liverpool.

### Work experience

During my MSc I worked part time as an Assistant Psychologist in Aintree hospital, with older adults with stroke or mental health issues under a brilliant Consultant Clinical Psychologist. Since aged 22 I have been staff at University of Liverpool and so

my work experience spans three Departments within the Institute of Population Health.

### Career challenges

It can be difficult making the transition from Research Associate/ Post Doc to independent researcher or from trainee roles to autonomous health psychologist. Perseverance and grit are key to success. It can be particularly difficult to find health psychologist roles in the NHS, although Heads of Departments I've spoken to and worked with (all clinical psychologists) have been very receptive to health psychologists working in patient facing roles.

### What interested you in health psychology?

The idea that we can contribute towards enhancing the quality of life for people with acute, chronic or terminal health conditions. And the chance to work with people who bring other perspectives and knowledge to the table- you are constantly learning about different approaches.

### Future aspirations

For health psychologists to have clearer practitioner pathways and roles in health services.

### Advice for students and trainees

Don't worry about deciding which area you want to work in too early in your career. 16 years after starting my BSc I'm still unsure! Build networks wherever you go and whatever you do. Be aware of your professional boundaries. Seek to break down barriers for people who come after you.



## Health psychology training

I discovered Health Psychology within my A Level Psychology and my undergraduate Psychology degree at the University of Kent in 2003. I then went on to complete an MSc in Health Psychology, MSc in Research Methods in Psychology, PGCert in Clinical Applications in Psychology and PhD in Community Care in 2013. In 2016, I started my Stage 2 Health Psychology training through the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Health Psychologist training scheme with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGG&C). In 2019, I qualified as an HCPC-registered and chartered health psychologist. To support my new Lecturer role, I'm working towards an PGCert in Academic Practice at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and Doctorate in Education specialising in educational leadership.

## Current role

Since October 2020, I've worked as a full-time Lecturer in Psychology at GCU and support doctoral health psychology trainees with placements as Placement Coordinator. I also represent DHP Scotland as acting secretary and social media representative, as well as the DHP equality, diversity and inclusion team.

## Work experience

I primarily developed interests in health psychology through voluntary NHS Assistant Psychologist roles in mental health services, working as Research Assistant/Associate in Health Psychology for Professor Susan Michie at UCL and working alongside health psychologists in a Diabetes Psychology service. My PhD enhanced sensitivity to diversity and inclusion, by exploring lived experiences of people from minority ethnic groups living in care homes for adults with learning disabilities and older people across England. I then explored health behaviours among people with mental health problems during my Stage 2 training with NES and NHSGG&C. After qualifying as a health psychologist, I specialized in homeless health, evaluation and public health within NHSGG&C.

## Career challenges

In the NHS, working as the only health psychologist in multidisciplinary teams, was often challenging. The lack of NHS health psychologist roles and competition from larger psychology professions, sometimes seemed particularly problematic. Career challenges included managing uncontrollable and unpredictable events, alongside self-doubt and 'impostor syndrome'! Furthermore, managing financial demands of postgraduate training evoked barriers.

## Advice for students and trainees

- Ensure to prioritise self-care and reframe challenging events into learning prospects to help withstand challenges and unforeseen barriers.
- Network, make yourself known to health psychologists and utilise every opportunity.
- Be prepared to promote health psychology!
- Don't be afraid to ask for help, apply creativity and think outside the box!

# Dr Debbie Williams



## Health psychology training

University of West England (UWE) through and through (BSc Psychology, MSc Psychology, Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology)

## Current role

Health Psychologist in an NHS Pain Self-Management Service

## Work experience

Long-term condition management predominantly fatigue and pain management. Prior to qualification I have worked in various NHS settings: public health, mental health, sexual health services and research and development.

## Career challenges

Working in services where a clinical psychologist or counselling psychologist was in post, so felt need to demonstrate value I and health psychology could offer. This year with COVID-19 several challenges feeling outside my comfort zone, first being re-deployed into staff support and secondly working entirely via telephone and video calls, particularly groups feel very different and the IT frustrations related to this next way of working still occur. Whilst not a career challenge, I do at times struggle to balance work-life-balance, so when it is getting hectic for me I need to pay closer attention and make some changes. I absolutely suffer with imposter syndrome too, so am just waiting for the day I'm caught out!

## What interested you in health psychology?

Human contact and how relatable I found the work. Behaviour change, adapting to physical and mental health challenges, living healthier lives, supporting other professionals give more holistic care. I liked the research focus in the training and work as well as teaching and clinical applications.

## Future aspirations

Continue to meet and surround myself by wonderful professionals to teach me how to live a rich life and provide better support to the patients, colleagues and students I support. I really love the MDT teams I work in so would want to keep doing this. In previous years I have been supporting

universities on MSc programmes so seeking more opportunities for this alongside clinical work is always something I will look out for. I want to get back on the research horse and hope I still remember how to ride when I do!

## Advice for students and trainees

Work with other disciplines it's the best! You can learn so much, understanding the commonality and differences in useful and interesting. Practice what we preach – having first-hand experience will deepen your work than knowing only the theoretical stuff, keep doing things that interest you (it'll be a hard slog otherwise!), make links particularly in areas/services you want to work in, creating opportunities if there aren't any.

**6 to 10 years**



## Health psychology training

I did my undergraduate degree at Oxford University in 2008 and then my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at the University of Bath in 2009-10. My Stage 2 Health Psychology training in 2010-12 was through the NHS Education for Scotland Trainee Health Psychologists scheme and I became HCPC-registered in 2013. In 2015, I got the studying bug again taking a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) diploma at the University of Dundee to become a registered CBT therapist. I recently completed my PhD by prior publication whilst working in my university role.

## Current role

I currently have a few roles which can be a bit hectic, but I love balancing practice, applied research and training our future health psychologists. I work as a Senior Lecturer in Health Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University as programme lead for our practice-focussed MSc Health Psychology. It's especially rewarding seeing our Stage 1 students gain confidence in their practice skills and develop their passion for health psychology during their studies. I also work part time at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust as a practitioner health psychologist where I work with super physiotherapist, nurse and psychology colleagues helping people adjust to and manage chronic pain. Finally, I do sessional work as an online CBT therapist for Ieso Digital Health, where we're currently working on an exciting trial testing online CBT for people with type 2 diabetes.

## Work experience

I first became interested in the psychology of health whilst volunteering on a health and sanitation project in Uganda during my undergraduate degree. Afterwards, I lived in Geneva for a year working as an au pair. I ended up doing some literature reviewing with the International Centre for Migration and Health and over time I realised every project involved psychology and that I wanted to become a health psychologist!

Coming back to the UK, I enjoyed learning about public health research and practice, first as a

Stage 1 student on placement at the University of Bristol Department of Social Medicine and then doing my Stage 2 within NHS Grampian's public health directorate. On qualifying, I developed my practice skills whilst working in NHS Grampian public health, diabetes and sexual health teams. I then moved to the University of Manchester to work with Profs. Jo Hart and Lucie Byrne-Davis on health professional behaviour change in the UK and in Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda as part of The Change Exchange.

## Career challenges

There are still misperceptions about health psychologists' skills and competencies, and I have been frustrated to be overlooked for therapeutic roles where an employer simply preferred to stick to appointing the 'type' of psychologist they were most familiar with. Open recruiting practices are good for clinical teams and for our patients, bringing innovative ideas for better quality care through the diverse skill mix. Several roles and projects have come about through chance conversations with multi-disciplinary colleagues about their team's needs, so I think health psychologists need the confidence to be able to say 'we can help you with that!'

## Advice for students and trainees

Take every chance to speak with as many health psychologists as you can. That way you'll learn more about the brilliant work they do in the NHS, universities, councils, schools, private practice and many more settings. Our job titles are not always 'health psychologist': I know of a huge range of inspiring trainee and qualified colleagues using health psychology in varied ways in the UK and overseas.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at GCU and then a PhD examining health behaviours in nurses also at GCU. My path to health psychology was not direct and I then undertook a MSc occupational psychology at the University of Strathclyde. I have worked in academic and private practice and became an HCPC Practitioner Psychologist in 2012.

## Current role

I am currently the Programme Director for the DPsych Health Programme at GCU where I'm responsible for monitoring and managing its academic health and the overall quality of the student learning experience. Our programme is unique in its situation within an Applied Psychology Doctoral Framework and in its combination of Stage 1 and Stage 2 training. With such a significant proportion of shared standards and competencies for practitioner psychologists, postgraduate programmes have the opportunity to move away from historically entrenched, domain-specific training structures, which typically emphasise the *differences* between applied psychology practice. Here, at GCU, we offer a broad, Applied Psychology Doctoral Framework (APDF) which promotes the sharing of profession-specific resources, utilising inter-professional collaborations while still retaining a specific professional domain identity (e.g., health psychology).

## Work experience

I first became interested in the psychology of health when I was an undergraduate student. I managed to get a research assistant post working with the police service looking at PTSD and psychological wellbeing in probationers and serving police officers, and this furthered my interest. While undertaking my PhD and MSc I taught undergraduate students at a variety of universities and built up a range of experience as a tutor. I moved into research next securing a research fellow position with the Scottish Network for Chronic Pain Research within which my work had a focus on working with adherence and understanding the lived experience of those suffering unexpected health changes following, for example, amputations.

## Career challenges

As for most health psychologists one of the main challenges has been to describe my profession and explain my remit and abilities as a health psychologist. Seeing the profession develop has been exciting and now being in a role where I can really champion health psychology and promote health psychology training is very rewarding.

## Future aspirations

I'd love to return to client facing work at some point in the future but for now my aspirations are around developing and growing our doctoral programme and taking pride in the breadth and depth of skills that our graduates possess.

## Advice for students and trainees

Don't let anyone's misconceptions about health psychology put you off. Speak to as many people as you can to learn about the domain and to find out about their experiences. Be vocal about the profession and your desire to enter into it and enjoy watching health psychology go from strength to strength.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc Psychology in 2005 at Nottingham Trent University. I was awarded a full stipend from the MRCI to do the full-time MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) UCL. I was awarded a 3-year stipend from National Institute Health Research (NIHR) Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLARHCs) Manchester to do the research for my PhD which focused on diabetes management in the British South Asian population. I also did the BPS Stage 2 health psychology training via the independent route alongside my doctoral research.

## Current role

I am currently working for a private health organisation called MoreLife Ltd. I am the Clinical Lead and Health Psychologist for the Greater Manchester Specialist Adult Weight Management service. I am responsible for the clinical supervision of the adult weight management practitioners who deliver the psychoeducation groups to clients. I endeavour to ensure that the programmes are delivered to the highest standard to achieve positive outcomes for our clients.

I also provide clinical guidance as part of the multidisciplinary team for clients who have been referred to the service and have complex psychological needs. A core part of my role is to identify an optimal care pathway for these individuals through psychological assessment and provision of psychological therapy.

## Work experience

I have gained work experience in a wide range of settings including charity, academia, voluntary, NHS and private businesses. I did some voluntary work in the NHS and academia prior to doing my Stage 2 training and PhD research. After completing my Stage 2 training, in 2016, I was fortunate to get a job in the NHS to work as a health psychologist in the Local Specialist Obesity Service at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This experience enabled me to gain first-hand experience of specialist psychological assessments using a biopsychosocial approach to understand the impact of obesity on both physical

and mental health. I applied formulation-driven, evidence-based therapeutic interventions to empower patients to make and sustain long-term lifestyle behaviour changes (e.g., eating habits) and/or prepare patients for bariatric surgery.

## Career challenges

One of the main challenges of my clinical practice has been having to work independently as a health psychologist within a multi-disciplinary team of health care professionals, who have not worked with psychologists before. During my time at Blackpool Teaching Hospital NHS, I set up the health psychology service and trained and supervised my colleagues in the relevant areas of health psychology to enhance their clinical practice for patient benefit (e.g. psychological assessment, motivational interviewing, psychological aspects of obesity). I had to work with a lot of resistant and pre-existing staff beliefs and attitudes related to behaviour change. However, through good clinical supervision and peer support from groups such as the Manchester Health Psychology Skills Practice Group I was able to build my confidence and knowledge on how to overcome some of these challenges.

## Advice for students and trainees

Get as much clinical work experience as you can (e.g., NHS or clinical voluntary work), as this will help you when you apply for health psychology jobs both in the NHS or the private sector. Continue to network with your peers and colleagues to learn more about their experiences of securing clinical work. Have a vision and don't let others put you off. When I started doing my Stage 2 training, my fellow peers would often say 'there is not point as there are no jobs in the NHS' but I am proud to say that I have proved them wrong!



# Clare Robinson



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at the University of Huddersfield in 2000 and completed my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at Staffordshire University in 2001. My Stage 2 Health Psychology training from 2009-2011 was through the NHS Education for Scotland Trainee Health Psychologist scheme.

## Current role

Since 2019 I have worked part-time at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust as a Health

Psychologist in Chronic Pain and Rheumatology, where I work with a great multidisciplinary team helping people adjust to and manage chronic pain and rheumatological conditions.

## Work experience

I worked in various NHS health promotion roles in between Stage 1 and Stage 2 training; as a Specialist Stop Smoking Adviser for 5 years, as a Learning Co-ordinator for a pilot Health Coach project for 1 year, and as a Senior Health Promotion Officer for training health professionals for 1 year. I gained some practice skills and confidence in working with a patient population and in teaching and training health professionals during this time. My Stage 2 training was based in a large psychology department in NHS Fife and involved working with public health and diabetes teams where I developed practice skills further. I became HCPC registered in 2012.

I then had my first child, and lived overseas with my husband's job for 3 years. During some of this time I was fortunate enough to work part time as a Research Associate for the University of Stirling conducting a systematic review on effective components of self-management interventions and extraction of behaviour change techniques. On returning back to the UK I got a further part-time post as Research Associate for the University of Cumbria, which included a qualitative evaluation of the NHS Nursing Degree Apprenticeship. I then returned to the NHS when I saw an opportunity to cover maternity leave as Health Psychologist in a Specialist Obesity Service, before moving into my current role.

## Career Challenges

Lack of funding to support ongoing practice-based health psychology roles in NHS Boards after completing NHS Stage 2 training, and employer preference for appointing by specific psychologist job title, has made securing practice-based job roles more difficult. A shift towards competency-based recruitment should help with this though I think that health psychologists will still have the ongoing challenge of having to really promote their practice experience and/or additional training to help others understand the scope of what health psychologists can offer teams and services. My preference for part-time work occasionally results in me working a bit in my 'home' time and so I make sure I keep this in check in order to maintain my work/family life balance.

## Advice for students and trainees

If you are interested in practice-based work, seek out as many opportunities as you can to gain some experience – paid or unpaid - in a practice setting, even if it is not directly in the area you hope to develop your career. This will help develop your connections and showcase the great work you can do! And, my experience has shown me that even if you have a break in your career, or shift roles (e.g. from a research to a clinical role), there are ways to get back in if you persevere.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc in Psychology at the University of Leeds in 2011 and started a MSc in Health Psychology a year later at King's College London. I started my PhD soon after finishing my MSc, completing it part time whilst working on a large randomised controlled trial that my PhD was based on. I completed the Stage 2 independent health psychology doctoral training at the same time, completing it in 3 years. I finished my PhD in 2018.

## Current Role

I'm currently a health psychologist and CBT therapist working in an IAPT service within the NHS. I lead on the long-term conditions pathway. I am also on secondment 2 days a week at King's College London coordinating and delivering top up training in long term conditions work for IAPT therapists.

## Work experience

During my MSc, I did a clinical placement in an IAPT service which was running mindfulness groups for people with long term conditions. My MSc thesis was on a remote Skype delivered mindfulness intervention for multiple sclerosis. These experiences gave me a great insight into the experience of chronic illnesses and how psychological approaches could be used to improve adjustment and distress.

During my PhD, I worked on a large randomised controlled trial which was assessing remote delivered cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for irritable bowel syndrome. This gave me experience of trial coordination, interviewing participants, data management, complex statistics, and intervention development. I completed some bits of CBT training and mindfulness training and pursued opportunities delivering these approaches to those with chronic illnesses, myself whilst completing my Stage 2 training.

## What interested you in health psychology?

That mind-body interaction. I'm fascinated by how the mind influences the body and the interaction between the two. My passion is working with people to make psychological and behavioural changes to improve symptom experience, whether that is symptom severity or the impact that symptoms have on peoples' lives. I am interested in how people make sense of their physical experiences and what role that plays in their overall experience.

## Future aspirations

During my studies, research, clinical and personal experiences, I have become aware of the gender health inequalities that exist. Bladder and urogynaecological issues are highly prevalent amongst women, but currently treatment approaches lack efficacy. I want to establish a biopsychosocial approach to improve symptoms and healthcare experiences for women who have ongoing symptoms.

## Advice for students and trainees

Don't feel like you have to do everything at once. Explore different areas at your own pace. It is all relevant and all valuable to learning. If you do Stage 2 independently, approach it from the perspective of designing your own curriculum. What do you want to get out of it?

Lastly, connect with your fellow students. Learning is more fun with others and the support is invaluable.

**10 years +**

# Professor Aimee Aubeeluck



## Health psychology training

I completed my BA in Psychology at the University of Luton in 2000 and went on to complete my Stage 1 MSc and PhD at the University of Derby to gain status as chartered health psychologist through the grandparenting route in 2005 with the BPS. I later became a registered psychologist with the HCPC in 2009.

## Current role

I work as a Professor of Health Psychology Education within the School of Health Sciences at the University of Nottingham. This is a rewarding role that gives me the opportunity to teach the principles of health psychology to physiotherapists, nurses and midwives and supervise PhDs within this field. I am also a Registration Assessor for the HCPC where I assess International and EU applicants' eligibility to the join the HCPC register and am a Stage 2 Qualification in Health Psychology (QHP) examiner.

## Work experience

As an academic health psychologist, I have not been employed in a clinical setting however many of my research and academic interests see me collaborating in clinical areas within the NHS or engaging with partners such as Health Education England (HEE).

## Career challenges

Working in an academic department that encompasses health science but not psychology as a core subject has been one of the biggest challenges I have encountered. However, flying the flag for the profession and ensuring health psychology is delivered and learnt in a robust, meaningful and applicable way and seeing the impact that this knowledge can have on patient care is incredibly rewarding.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I was initially drawn to health psychology through my interest in quality vs quantity of life in chronic illness. This interest still influences many aspects of what I do, underpinning my teaching, research and consultancy.

## Future aspirations

One of my aspirations has been to make more of a visible contribution to the profession and I have recently moved further towards this goal by being co-opted onto the DHP committee as equality and diversity lead.

## Advice for students and trainees

Don't give up, it can feel tough and the training will stretch you but I promise the career and opportunities ahead of you are so worth it. Pace yourself and surround yourself with likeminded peers and mentors who will support you through your training and will celebrate your successes with you.



## Health psychology training

After a year of undergraduate medicine, I decided that the psychology of health was where my interests lay so I switched to the BSc in Psychology at the University of Birmingham. I went from there to study an MSc in Health Psychology at the University of Bath (one of the first BPS accredited courses in the country). I was self-funding, so I worked full time alongside the part-time MSc, as an assistant psychologist in a memory clinic. Combining both of these interests, I studied for my PhD, funded by pharma, at the University of Bristol in the measurement of quality of life in dementia. I became a full member of the Division of Health Psychology of the BPS and later, became a registered health psychologist after applying to the Health and Care Professions Council.

## Current role

I am a Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Manchester. My research is about interventions to change health worker practices. I have some teaching leadership roles in the undergraduate medical programme, where I lead for some assessments and for behavioural and social sciences. My practice is about working with health partnerships between the UK and low- and middle-income countries to support change in health worker practices. I am passionate about the growth of health psychology, and that has led me to roles in the European Health Psychology Society and the Division of Health Psychology of the BPS, as well as running some volunteering projects for health psychologists.

## Work experience

During and after my PhD, I worked for the Medical Research Council Health Services Research Collaboration and the Department of Social Medicine at the University of Bristol, and received an ESRC fellowship to write up papers from my PhD and grant applications. Having had baby number one during my PhD and baby number two a couple of years later, I had a very short stint working remotely for UCL before baby number three came along. I was working off and on and part-time only during this time. I then worked as a research fellow at the University of Liverpool for a year in

one of the Medical Research Council Trial Methodology Hubs. From there, I got a permanent lectureship at the University of Manchester, working on health professional education and assessment. I have remained at the University of Manchester and was promoted to Professor in 2020.

## What interested you in health psychology?

My year as a medical student, in which we started to learn about the biopsychosocial model was what interested me the most. I fell into the MSc in health psychology because I was interested in quality of life and the WHO quality of life group hub was there. Now, I am passionate about applied health psychology, leaving some of the big discoveries to brilliant colleagues whilst I work with organisations to discover how these discoveries can be useful in supporting health.

## Future aspirations

I am currently working to try to systematise the use and generation of evidence for health worker practice change interventions in health partnerships, so that we can increase the efficacy and efficiency of activities to improve care quality and ultimately improve health. I am looking forward to being able to travel again and meet with colleagues in different countries.

## Advice for students and trainees

Try to enjoy what you are currently doing and think about medium term goals without thinking too strategically about the long term. Things change so rapidly, it's important to enjoy what you are doing. Don't be afraid to make contact with people. Health psychology is a small world and quite an exceptionally friendly one. Most people are really happy to support others in their early careers.



## Health Psychology training

I completed my BA (Hons) Psychology (2000) and MSc Health Psychology (2001) at the University of Luton. After a short break to have my second child, I studied for a PhD at the University of Surrey Roehampton, graduating in 2007. During my PhD, I focused on building competencies for my Stage 2 portfolio. This included teaching psychological approaches to public health on the MSc and doing consultancy work on a 'supporting people' programme, looking at the health needs of vulnerable people, funded by the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister. My PhD, which researched young people's health behaviours (e.g. eating, exercise), parental influence, and the effectiveness of a theoretically-driven behaviour change intervention provided my other competencies. I became chartered in 2004 through grand-parenting and registered with the HCPC in 2009.

## Current role

I'm now a Professor of Health Psychology and Behaviour Change at the University of Bedfordshire and the Director of the Institute for Sport and Physical Activity Research. My time is split between funded research, leadership and management, mentoring and supervision, teaching and unit co-ordination, and consultancy. The golden thread that runs through everything that I do is behaviour change methodology and reaching vulnerable groups to optimise health and wellbeing. I'm passionate about our discipline and have had various citizenship roles, including UK National Delegate for the European Health Psychology Society, co-founder of both the Health Psychology Exchange and the Health Psychology in Public Health Network (now called the Behavioural Science and Public Health Network) and the current Chair of the Division of Health Psychology.

## Work experience

I've worked as a health care assistant in an adult mental health unit, where I took shifts on the 24-hour 'suicide watch' and supported mindfulness therapy. My time as a CAMHS Researcher at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, investigated eating behaviour and mental health. Once qualified, I worked as a Health Psychologist

to specialist obesity services with individuals with a BMI >35 with co-morbidities (e.g. diabetes) as part of an MDT supporting behaviour change for those undergoing bariatric surgery. My first lecturership was at the University of Luton in 2005, where I later led the MSc Health Psychology. In 2012, I moved to University College London (UCL) School of Pharmacy as a Lecturer in Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine, working in the area of medication adherence and affiliated to the UCL Centre for Behaviour Change, where I am now an Associate. In 2016, I re-joined the University of Bedfordshire as a Reader in the School of Sport Science and Physical Activity, and developed the Centre for Health, Wellbeing and Behaviour Change, which I now lead.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I realised during my time in treatment settings, that what I was really interested in was prevention. Both my parents died in my 20s of conditions heavily influenced by their behaviour. The science of behaviour change became a huge passion, to prevent ill health rather than to treat it.

## Future aspirations

To see funded career pathways across the UK in health psychology, from in-training through to senior leadership roles. Health psychology has a huge role to play in society, and I want to see proper investment for the future of our discipline.

## Advice for students and trainees

Work in areas that you enjoy, with people that make you smile, in networks that get you excited. Network, collaborate, inspire others and for all you receive, 'pay it forward'. Stay connected to your health psychology family, be proud of your identity and if an opportunity presents itself, go for it!



## Health psychology training

I completed my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at the University of Nottingham in 2006. I then started my Stage 2 Health Psychology training in Scotland as part of the first cohort of trainees on the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Scheme, which I completed in 2010.

## Current role

I currently work in the Tayside Substance Misuse Service. Much of the work is focused on training, coaching and consultancy with the staff, e.g., around motivational interviewing and relapse prevention. I deliver groups around emotional regulation and relapse prevention and one-to-one work with patients. I also work as the Health Psychology Tutor for NES, providing supervision, training, and broader programme support for the trainee health psychologists in Scotland.

## Work experience

After qualifying as a health psychologist, I worked in a variety of roles in clinical health psychology and public health. This included oncology, blood borne virus, paediatrics services, and delivering behavioural health services within general practice, along with running an acceptance and commitment therapy-based group for people with long-term conditions. In public health roles, I have developed behaviour change interventions for looked after young people, evaluated a safe driving intervention developed volitional help sheets for smoking and sexual health and healthy messaging interventions on touch screens placed in a hospital. Despite not always being on permanent contract, this variety means I've enjoyed getting involved in a range of interesting projects and expanding my experiences.

## Career challenges

It's always challenging for health psychologists to get their skills recognised and I have experienced this personally too. There can be assumptions about what your training has involved and what therapeutic/intervention skills you hold. Most

challenging of all, when applying for jobs with clinical psychologists, my experience is that they tend to focus on how your skills compare to those of clinical psychologists, which is understandable given that that's what they know and understand. There are of course overlaps with clinical psychology but when the comparison is uni-directional there are challenges. The best service leads embrace a skill-mix and recognise the value of employing health psychologists: they value the unique skills health psychologists can bring.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I was working in a mental health setting after my undergraduate and became really interested in the role that (un)healthy eating and physical activity played in influencing people's symptoms and experiences of mental health problems. I'd undertaken a health psychology module as part of my undergraduate, so this along with my experiences working in mental health made me want to pursue a career in health psychology.

## Future aspirations

I'm passionate about the role health psychology can play within health and social care services, particularly in integrated multidisciplinary teams. I hope to be able to help drive forward roles for health psychologists in health and social care, for patient benefit, along with continuing to work within these teams, and directly with patients myself.

## Advice for students and trainees

Really know your skills and be confident in selling them, and try not to be too put off if you don't get a post... we've all experienced this and if you keep applying you're likely to get the right post for you.

# Professor Kate Hamilton-West



## Health psychology training

I qualified as a Chartered health psychologist in 2004 after completing a PhD in Health Psychology and period of supervised practice. My thesis focused on coping with stress and chronic illness, with a particular focus on the condition ankylosing spondylitis.

## Current role

I recently joined a multinational organisation applying data science and analytics to enhance human health. I work as part of a global team responsible for the design and delivery of a range of medical communications and patient support programmes. As a Behavioural Science Specialist, I am responsible for advising on health psychology research, theory, and methods, championing the integration of evidence-based approaches throughout programme design and delivery, creating behavioural programme content, conducting programme analysis and intervention evaluation.

## Work experience

After completing my PhD, I was appointed as a Lecturer in Health Psychology at the University of Kent, acting as Deputy Director and then Director of a BPS-accredited MSc in Health Psychology. In 2011, I moved to the Centre for Health Services Studies (CHSS), an interdisciplinary research centre working closely with NHS, Public Health and Social Care partners. As part of this role, I acted as Academic Lead for the NIHR Research Design Service South East, which provides research methods advice to academics and clinicians applying to competitive funding streams in health and social care.

I also acted as Faculty Director of Medical Social Sciences, which involved developing social sciences curricula for the new Kent and Medway Medical School. Alongside these roles, I worked for a charity providing NHS mental health services. This involved designing and implementing a new NHS diabetes psychology service, developing training for psychological therapists, and supporting clients experiencing reduced psychological wellbeing in

the context of a long-term physical health condition. I was practitioner chair for the BPS Division of Health Psychology from 2012 to 2016.

## Advice for students and trainees

My main advice is to get to know other health psychologists and trainees - e.g., by joining a local network and attending conferences and training workshops. Make sure that you share your own experiences and insights as well as learning from others, even if you are at an early stage of career. Peer-reviewed journal articles are important, but also consider other forms of dissemination (e.g., talks to public, patient, or professional audiences, media articles and interviews) which can help to build a profile and reach a wider audience.





## Health psychology training

I attended the University of Huddersfield for my Undergraduate degree in Psychology. I went on to study a MSc Health Psychology (stage 1) full-time at the University of Nottingham in 2006.

Following my MSc, I undertook the independent Stage 2 route in Health Psychology and was supervised externally. I was in regular contact with my supervisor and followed the Stage 2 handbook. After qualifying in 2010, I studied Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and did a Diploma in CBT.

## Current role

I qualified as a health psychologist in 2010 and currently work in a private pain management clinic. I offer psychological therapy using ACT, compassion focused and CBT therapy. I have been involved in developing self-management programmes for people living with chronic pain and provide support to staff within my organisation. I have worked in public health as well as the private sector where I have designed, developed and evaluated behavioural change interventions for long term conditions for BAME groups.

## Work experience

Whilst pursuing the independent route in health psychology, I was working in public health. I gained most of my experience here. For example, I set up behaviour change interventions, providing a psychological stance to implementing public health policies, and worked with healthcare staff in primary and secondary settings. I delivered university level teaching to undergraduates and undertook private consultancy which enabled me to meet the competencies required by the BPS. I accessed a variety of experiences which enabled me to develop my skills as a practitioner health psychologist and decide I wanted to pursue my interest in long term conditions.

## Career challenges

I have always been interested in behaviour change and how the mind functions but have faced challenges in my role when developing my career in health psychology. I am glad there is more recognition for health psychologists now, however there is still far to go. I feel some employers don't

fully understand what we do and how we are different to other practitioners (i.e., public health specialists or clinical psychologists), so we have to showcase and sell our unique points!

## Advice for students and trainees

It is difficult to find jobs that are labelled 'health psychologist' but don't give up! Keep seeking opportunities and be creative with job searches. The beauty of health psychology is that it can be applied in many different settings, so read the job description and not just the title. If there isn't anything suitable, I would also say don't be afraid to approach people with what you can offer.



## Health psychology training

I graduated with BSc (Hons) Psychology from Cardiff University in 2001, spent 4 years working, then progressed to the MSc and Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE). I also hold a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in HE.

## Current role

I am a Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader at the University of the West of England (UWE)

## Work experience

My first graduate role at Oxford University involved conducting a systematic review in smoking and genetics, and transcribing patient interviews for 'Health Talk Online'. From 2001 to 2004, I was a Research Assistant at the Department of Psychiatry, Oxford University working across studies with patients with eating disorders. This led to assistant psychologist roles in NHS Primary Care, and later the community mental health team, working clinically with patients with a range of mental health issues.

From late 2005, I moved to research roles in the Centre for Appearance Research at UWE exploring the psychosocial impact of appearance altering health conditions. In 2012, I became a Lecturer in Health Psychology and Research Methods, then Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader at UWE.

## Career challenges

Juggling multiple work responsibilities around a young family is always a challenge. I try to practise what I preach as health psychologist and find a good balance, but that's not always easy.

## What interested you in health psychology?

My early research roles at Oxford first piqued my interest in health psychology. Equally, when working in NHS primary care, I found that many patients referred with depression and anxiety were experiencing the everyday impacts of their health condition. This included stress, fatigue, difficulty exercising and eating healthily, loneliness, lack of agency and self-esteem. When clinical psychology training beckoned, my gut told me not to apply-

I wanted to focus on how best to support these patients and explore the psychology of health and illness.

## Advice for students and trainees

To be confident in your identity and value as a health psychologist. Teams don't often know they need a health psychologist until they have one- be a trailblazer and demonstrate your specialist knowledge.

Be an advocate for our profession, use your title (appropriately) and champion those in training. If you get offered an opportunity that isn't feasible for you, pay it forward.

Communicate your work to the public. Keep health psychology on the agenda!



## Health psychology training

I did my BA in Psychology, in Istanbul. I then did my MSc in Health Psychology at UCL. This was before Stage 1 years! I then did my PhD in Social/Health Psychology at Rutgers University, USA. I became a health psychologist through the previous grand parenting route.

## Current role

I'm currently an academic at the University of St Andrews. I do research and also teach behavioural science to medical students and health psychology in our MSc in Health Psychology.

## Work experience

After I did my first degree, I worked at a psychiatric institution near Cardiff for a year. This was to see if clinical psychology was for me. It wasn't. I also worked as a health psychologist in Edinburgh Cancer Centre and Maggie's cancer charity on an honorary basis.

## Career challenges

Having moved around different countries meant that I had to re-establish myself each time in different health psychology research, practice, and teaching environments. It takes time to make roots. But I wouldn't change it – I love those connections to wonderful health psychologists all over the world. I learned so much from colleagues with different approaches to problems and solutions we face in health psychology.

## What interested you in health psychology?

It was personal in the beginning. My father had died of cancer as well as other family members. I found myself fascinated by management of illness by patients and their family members. I was also fascinated by cultural differences in approaches to health, health care and health behaviours. Overall, what attracts me to health psychology is its multitude of approaches to a diverse set of questions that will benefit society.

## Future aspirations

Personally, I find myself very much drawn to creating more solid links between health care and community-based, citizen-led approaches. For health psychology, in general, I want to ensure that there are opportunities for early career health psychologists in whatever role they wish to contribute to our field, whether it's teaching, research, or practice.

## Advice for students and trainees

a) Whatever your role is, engage in a daily practice of writing. I wish I could do this daily as it's so important to put our thoughts into words so we can share them and discuss them with others.

B) See if you can make connections between ideas, fields, practices in areas that seem disparate.

C) Join twitter – so much to learn from others and share.

# Dr Shilpa Patel



## Health psychology training

My journey in the world of psychology began with an undergraduate degree at the University of Leicester followed by an MSc in Health Psychology at Coventry University. I then subsequently went on to do the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at Staffordshire University from 2005-2008. During the doctorate, I was working as a researcher in the field of pain at the University of Leicester.

## Current role

Since completing my doctorate, I have been very fortunate to have been able to combine my clinical work with research. I have worked in a clinical trials unit applying behaviour change theory in the design of complex interventions for long-term pain conditions. My clinical work has predominantly been in the area of pain and pain management and therefore both roles have really complemented each other.

## Career challenges

When I completed my doctoral training, health psychology was still a new area and therefore educating others about what health psychology is, what health psychologists do and how they fit into research and clinical environments were conversations I had regularly. These were not always easy discussions especially when it came to clinical application. A huge amount of work has been done by the Division to promote health psychology and I now hear colleagues from other disciplines talking about the need for more health psychologists which is such a positive move forward.

## What interested you in health psychology?

They say teachers can hugely inspire students and that has been very true for me. I had an amazing A-level psychology teacher who always encouraged and inspired us to explore psychology broadly. This is where I was introduced to health psychology, which at the time was totally new to me. My interest in the area grew further because of voluntary opportunities I had in areas of workplace stress management and befriending services for individuals with a range of long term mental and physical health problems. This led me to enrol onto

the MSc in Health Psychology at Coventry University.

## Advice for students and trainees

When looking for roles in health psychology it is worth looking broadly at opportunities as roles are not always advertised as health psychologists, but the person specification may map onto key transferable skills and competencies. I would also recommend contacting health psychologists to learn more about areas they work in as this may inspire you into application in new and novel areas of your own.



## Health psychology training

I trained in Liverpool and subsequently embarked on a part-time PhD, alongside working at Manchester Children's Hospital. I graduated in 2001, prior to *health psychologist* becoming a registered title, so didn't become HCPC-approved until 2007, via the 'grandparenting route' (which makes me sound very old!).

## Current role

As a senior academic at Manchester University, I balance teaching with research. I teach undergraduate and postgrads across many programmes, including our Stage 1 MSc and ClinPsychD. I research healthcare communication within challenging contexts such as medically unexplained symptoms, unhealthy behaviours, and suicide. I combine qualitative and trial methodologies to investigate how psychological interventions work, and how they could be implemented into routine care. I lead the behaviour science and qualitative stream for the NorthWest Research Design Service where we help clinicians secure research funding.

At Manchester I am lead for postgraduate researchers (PGRs), meaning I oversee the 1000+ doctoral trainees in the Faculty of Biology, Medicine & Health. PGRs have poorer mental health compared with population norms, and I lead a research programme investigating the reasons for, and how to overcome this.

## Work experience

My first role was with people with unexplained physical symptoms. They taught me how intertwined physical and mental health experiences are, and how unsatisfactory it is that services are delineated along these lines. Subsequently I have worked across a wide range of settings, helping clinicians work more collaboratively with patients. Health psychology has huge potential to bridge the physical-mental health divide, bringing together the biological, social and psychological.

## Career challenges

I love working in multidisciplinary teams, learning lots from clinical colleagues. The role of health psychologist remains poorly understood by other clinicians and, as the only psychologist in the room, it is challenging to have to establish credibility and get your ideas heard. Often my role involves changing how clinicians work, which can challenge them. I need to draw on behaviour change and communication techniques to motivate them in turn to engage their patients.

## What interested you in health psychology?

I'd never heard of health psychology when I started out. I just followed my interests – people, science and health. Along the way I encountered this discipline and it fit.

## Future aspirations

My overriding goal is improving patients' experience. Key to that is equipping health professionals to communicate more effectively with patients, relatives, and colleagues. I am also passionate about those that create research. I want to apply my knowledge of healthcare communication to develop healthier research environments to grow our next generation of researchers.

## Advice for students and trainees

Work with people who are generous with their ideas and listen to yours. Those are the people who will enable you to blossom.



## Health psychology training

I completed a BSc (Hons) Psychology at the University of Portsmouth (1992), followed by a health-related PhD (1995), also at the University of Portsmouth. I discovered health psychology when I joined the University of Bath (2002). There, I was encouraged by Prof Suzy Skevington to apply to become a member of the profession through what was called the 'Grandparenting Route'. This meant that you had to put a case together to show how your experience to date equated to the skills and competences of a health psychologist. Once I was accepted into the world of health psychology, I joined the DHP committee, first as an ordinary member, then as secretary for a few years, then I was part of a fantastic team that ran a huge DHP / EHPS combined conference in 2008. And later still, I was elected chair of DHP and served from 2014-2018.

## Current role

Professor of Health Psychology at Staffordshire University.

## Work experience

Mostly in academia: Lecturer (University of Central Lancashire, University of Surrey), Research Fellow (University of Oxford), Senior Lecturer (University of Bath), Professor (Staffordshire University). However, when I lived in Bath I did manage to combine being a practising NHS health psychologist with my academic role. I worked with people living with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases.

## Career challenges

For me now, the biggest challenge is the metricisation of everything. I get frustrated with the way everything is reduced to numbers. It feels like the core value of what we are doing, whether that be teaching, research or practice, risks being swallowed up by the (meaningless) numbers.

## What interested you in health psychology?

It wasn't till I began to work at the University of Bath that I heard of the profession. I love that health psychology takes a holistic approach and recognises the importance of the bigger picture when looking at health-related behaviour. Life context is so important.

## Future aspirations

Threefold:

- To push back against the metricisation of our world
- To continue to work with our professional body to move the focus towards competences and away from labels
- To maybe find a way to combine academia with practice again

## Advice for students and trainees

Focus on growing your skills, competences, experiences. Stay curious. Avoid making assumptions: follow Jeanne LeVasseur's approach and become a naïve questioner. Be open to alternative viewpoints. In fact, seek out alternative viewpoints. Collaborate with different professions. Look outside your own life context.



## Health psychology training

I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Leicester, followed by an MSc in Health Psychology (Coventry University) and then the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology (Staffordshire University) 2004-2008. My continuing professional development includes a range of learning such as behaviour change in the management of long-term conditions, exercise sport and health psychology, mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy to media training and a range of academic courses (for research and teaching).

## Current role

My role is quite varied whilst still having a core set of principles and values within health psychology.

**Research:** I am an Associate Professor, Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, University of Warwick. I am currently leading the first clinical trial in the UK funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) on Improving the Wellbeing of Opioid Treated CHronic Pain (I-WOTCH). In addition to this I am co-investigator (providing methodological expertise in designing complex behaviour change interventions) across several clinical trials in the area of chronic pain, neurology (chronic headaches), respiratory health (pulmonary hypertension and postural tachycardia syndrome), rare diseases (Dystonia) and more recently COVID-19 rehabilitation following hospitalisation.

**Teaching:** Within Warwick Medical School, I lead health psychology teaching for the undergraduate MBChB course (applying health psychology to medicine) and various post graduate courses. I am also an examiner for the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology (Staffordshire University) and deliver a lecture on the taught programme.

**Clinical and applied work:** My clinical work includes application of health psychology in pain management, training healthcare professionals (NHS) and I am co-founder and Director of a

consultancy practice which allows me to develop my portfolio of applied health psychology work.

Advocate of the health psychology community: I have recently joined the DHP committee and look forward to engaging with the global health psychology community.

## Work experience

During my MSc, I studied breaking bad news (doctor patient communication) and went on to collaborate with colleagues at Johns Hopkins University (USA). Every so often my work does a complete cycle, bringing me back to communication skills through teaching, research, or applied work. This doesn't surprise me as at the heart of consultations and healthcare is communication!

## Career challenges

When I started at the University of Warwick I was the only health psychologist in my department and found it challenging to see how my role could fit. However as our community and awareness has grown it's been amazing to be able to develop a reputation and expertise in behaviour change. I have developed as a clinical trialist and am proud to be a health psychologist and chief investigator of a large multi-centre clinical trial.

## Advice for students and trainees

Don't be afraid to reach out to the health psychology community, we are a friendly bunch. We have grown tremendously as a network. Follow your interests as we have many transferable skills which we can apply within our professional boundaries. Make your journey as colourful as you would like whilst following your values as health psychologist.



## Health psychology training

I completed my BSc (Hons) in Applied Psychology at the University of Durham in 2001 followed by my MSc in Health Psychology (Stage 1) at Teesside University in 2002. I later undertook the British Psychological Society independent Stage 2 route becoming HCPC registered in 2009. In 2013 I completed my PhD which explored women's longitudinal experiences of breast cancer and treatment decision-making. I am a registered clinical hypnotherapist and have completed courses in several psychological therapies to add to my therapeutic toolkit.

## Current role

I am a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Teesside University and lead, and teach, on our MSc Health Psychology programme. I undertake research, chair an ethics committee and supervise doctoral students. I have recently developed a health psychology clinic and hybrid interventions team as part of the university's counselling service. Our MSc students can volunteer to work with us to provide support and activities around health behaviours to enhance student wellbeing and academic outcomes. I love the variety my job brings and enjoy seeing our students develop and achieve things they never thought possible. It's always rewarding to see a student become an expert in their field and implement change through health psychology.

## Work experience

While undertaking my MSc I began working within spinal rehabilitation and realised that there was a role for health psychology in supporting patients with long-term conditions. My desire to become a health psychologist grew when I was employed to evaluate surgical and nursing roles to inform re-design of the cardiothoracic workforce to improve patient outcomes and staff development. I enjoyed developing my research skills and went on to conduct a series of rapid systematic reviews around health promotion interventions while beginning to research living with and beyond cancer. The linkage between research, policy, and practice guided my work and led me into teaching evidence-based practice.

## Career challenges

Many health psychology jobs are not advertised using those terms and misperceptions around what health psychologists do and what skills we have remain commonplace. Students can become discouraged when employers are advertising for other psychology professions when the role is within a health remit. However, I am increasingly seeing more open recruitment and clinical teams willing to recruit on the basis of qualifications and skill set rather than role title. Trainees gaining therapeutic skills in a way that is recognised by employers within practice settings is a positive step forward.

## Advice for students and trainees

Engage with others, different conversations can lead to learning and new opportunities. Gain a range of experience to help support your training in the health psychology competencies and have confidence in yourself and your abilities. The knowledge and skills of health psychologists are needed more than ever and this profession provides an opportunity to follow your interests and shape your own future.





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