Greater Manchester
Primary Care Patient Safety
Translational Research Centre

NHS
National Institute for
Health Research

Meet the Team

Jane Sarginson

Daphne Jackson Fellow, Medication Safety theme

Firstly, please tell us a little bit about your background and your role in the Greater Manchester PSTRC.

I actually trained as a biochemist and then moved into psychiatric genetics. I've always been really interested in how our experiences, particularly stressful ones, and previous environmental exposures, like smoking or ill health, affect how we respond to changes in our environment and how our genetics modifies those changes, so it wasn't really surprising when I started drifting towards epidemiology. There are just a lot of different things to look at and no two people are the same, so you end up needing very big data sets if you are ever going to get the faintest clue of what is going on. I joined Greater Manchester PSTRC in June on a Daphne Jackson fellowship after taking a career break with the aim of studying physical health complications in people with depression.

How did you first get involved with patient safety research and what do you find most challenging about it?

I became interested in patient safety research while working as a pharmacogenetist on clinical trials for antidepressant drugs and addiction therapies at Stanford University. The thinking behind my part in these projects was fairly simple and ran along the lines of 'if we can identify genetic markers for how an individual is going to respond to a particular drug we can cut down the likelihood of them having an adverse drug reactions and hopefully improve their long-term prognosis by getting them onto the right drug as quickly as possible'. Of course things are never that simple, a lot of different factors affect how we respond to drugs. Working on these types of projects has really broadened my understanding of the difficulties in providing safe and effective treatments for psychiatric diseases, which often occur alongside physical health conditions and can be influenced by a broad assortment of environmental and biological factors. As well as making it clear that as far as possible treatments need to be personalised and take into account the wishes of the patient. What may be an acceptable side-effect, like weight gain, to one person can adversely impact the emotional wellbeing and future welfare of another.

What do you think will be the biggest changes in primary care in the next five years?

The amount of health related data available to researchers and clinicians has expanded exponentially over the last few decades. This has the potential to change how primary care is provided in a number of ways but the one that interests me the most is precision medicine. Researchers are now starting to be able to use large scale data sets to identify specific characteristics that can be used to help tailor healthcare to an individual. This could mean cutting down the time taken to get a cancer patient on the most effective treatment regime, providing early intervention for someone at high risk of developing cardiovascular disease or giving GPs a better idea of how to identify and treat rare or complicated conditions.

Tell us about someone who has influenced your choice of career (and why)

My parents bought me a chemistry set and a microscope for Christmas when I was 9 years old. Then, being my parents, taught me how to keep a lab book. It pretty much all went downhill from there.

What are you hoping to achieve with your research?

The main aim of the project is to improve our understanding of how people with depression are currently being treated in primary care and identify ways to improve that treatment.

When you are away from work, how do you spend your time relaxing?

I really like outdoor activities, even if the British weather can sometimes make things less than pleasant. I walk, scuba dive and paraglide, which all sounds very exciting but really they're just all ways of getting a good view. I'm also a scout leader, which is definitely not relaxing but can be very funny.

What is your party trick (or hidden talent)?

I can trip over my own feet without even trying.

If you could give one piece of advice to those interested in a research career, what would it be (and why)?

Research is full of setbacks and wrong turns, so pick something you are passionate enough about to keep going.