Lack of evidence for steroids in treating symptoms of sore throat in primary care

There is not enough evidence to recommended steroids as a treatment for symptoms of sore throat in patients seeing their GP according to researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Southampton and Bristol.

The primary aim of the TOAST (Treatment Options without Antibiotics for Sore Throat) trial was to investigate whether a single dose of oral dexamethasone compared with placebo increased resolution of symptoms at 24 hours after consultation. 565 patients were recruited from GP practices in south and west England, 288 patients received dexamethasone and 277 placebo. The results, published in JAMA on 18 April, show that although there was not much change in symptoms after 24 hours, after 48 hours significantly more participants experienced complete resolution in the dexamethasone group. However, for practicing GPs this effect has to be balanced against the side effects of steroids, the risk that more patients would come to see their GP if steroids were offered, and the lack of effect on measures such as time away from work, use of antibiotics and overall symptom burden. Read more.
Outstanding doctoral research award

Dr Abi Methley, Trainee Clinical Psychologist at the University of Manchester, received the 2016 Emerald and EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Award for her School funded research “Health care services for multiple sclerosis: The experiences of people with multiple sclerosis and health care professionals.” Abi was chosen by the editorial team of the Journal of Health Organization and Management for the highly commended award in the Healthcare Management category.

“I am grateful to the National Institute for Health Research School for Primary Care Research whose funding enabled the completion of this research.”

The award body commented on Abi’s research:

“This application was highly commended for the quality of the research and the important insights that it offers into the lived experience of individuals with MS seeking health care and psychological support. It provides important insights into the organisational structure of health care services for multiple sclerosis (MS), mental health care and long term conditions more generally and implications for management and leadership within multiple sclerosis care. The research has garnered impressive interest in a short amount of time having published five peer review papers to date and garnering significant numbers of downloads and citations. The work is theoretically rich and methodologically robust and provides insight into helpful issues that will inform policy and practice.”

Helen Dickson, Associate Professor Public Service Research, UNSW, Canberra.

Best poster prize

The University of Nottingham’s Sophie Orton won best poster prize at this year’s SAPC Trent, hosted by the University of Lincoln, on 21 March.

“The conference had a really interesting programme, including key note sessions by Professor Aneez Esmail from the University of Manchester, and Dr Navjoyt Ladher from the BMJ, and a range of engaging parallel sessions showcasing some of the excellent research being conducted within the Trent SAPC. I was thrilled to be awarded a prize for my poster titled ‘Predictors of postpartum return to smoking: a systematic review’. In this systematic review of 39 studies, we aimed to identify factors associated with postpartum return to smoking among women who had quit smoking for pregnancy to help inform the development of future interventions in this area. The poster highlighted the factors that could be targeted in interventions, such as intending to quit smoking only for the duration of pregnancy, partner/household smoking and confidence to remain abstinent. I tried to keep the text of the poster clear and concise, and emphasise the findings by presenting them in a format that was easy to read at a glance, which I think may have contributed to being awarded the poster prize. Overall, this was an interesting conference, and an excellent opportunity to showcase my research to a diverse audience.”
Dr Jenni Burt, from the University of Cambridge, has been awarded one of only two ‘papers of distinction’ places at the 46th Annual Scientific Meeting of the SAPC from 12 to 14 July 2017 at the University of Warwick. Dr Burt will present a talk titled ‘Developing a measure of appropriate polypharmacy in primary care: systematic review and RAND appropriateness study’. The paper presents aspects of a School funded study to develop and evaluate a measure of inappropriate polypharmacy. This first phase of the study used a group of clinical experts to identify the most important aspects of prescribing that might lead to inappropriate polypharmacy. In later phases, the research team will test the accuracy of the measure by looking at whether the results it provides are comparable to the expert opinion of doctors and pharmacists. Researchers then used the measure to quantify the extent of inappropriate polypharmacy in the UK population using a large electronic health record database.

OPTiMISE trial recruitment begins

The OPTiMISE trial opened in April and has recruited its first two patients to the study. The study aims to test the safety of reducing blood pressure lowering medications in elderly patients with mild hypertension.

The trial begins with a two stage feasibility study to test recruitment and retention rates and this will be conducted in the Thames Valley region. Stage one will aim to recruit 25 patients over three months. Stage two will aim to recruit a further 75 patients across 6 months. Assuming recruitment rates are as expected during this period, the trial will then roll out at the other coordinating centres in Cambridge and Southampton towards the end of the year. Because the target population will contain patients who are potentially frail and suffering from multiple long term conditions, the study team are trialling some novel approaches to patient recruitment which will be examined as part of a concurrent qualitative evaluation. These approaches include a simplified patient and carer information sheet and a video infographic detailing the key aspects of the study in a two minute animation.

NEW PPI FACEBOOK PAGE FOR THE SCHOOL

The internet is a key source of information for the general public. In particular, social media is increasingly relied upon by 18-24 year olds, and 51% of the public with online access use social media as a news source ². Social media offers a way for SPCR researchers to engage with the public by sharing publications and associated media coverage. Further, social media is a relatively un-tapped resource when it comes to recruiting PPI contributors. A SPCR Involvement and Engagement Facebook Page has been created to support such research activities.

This page has been co-produced with a panel of three PPI contributors, who advised on the wording of the page information, header image and post content, whilst the NIHR had final say on the appearance and logos used on the page. This will be a free and easy additional method of engaging and involving the public with research funded by the School. To make this page successful we need followers to like and share our posts, so please do follow when you can. We are always looking for content to share with the public, so please send any news items, blog articles, or PPI opportunities to the School’s PPI Officer, or your local PPI coordinator.

The School’s Director and Head of the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, Prof Richard Hobbs, opened SAPC South West with a warm welcome to Oxford and the Medical Sciences Teaching Centre.

A number of School members delivered oral and poster presentations from SPCR funded studies at the conference on 23 and 24 March. In the first of three keynote addresses, RCGP Chair Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard presented the General Practice Five Year Forward View and emphasised that key to putting patients first is understanding how the interface between primary and secondary care works best. Professor Peter Horby asked how primary care research can better contribute in preparing for epidemics; and Professor Sue Ziebland reflected on the contributions of qualitative social science for health research, in their subsequent addresses.

Former SPCR trainee Clare McDermott gave this feedback: “Highlights for me particularly focussed on effective communication in primary care. An intriguing presentation by Charlotte Albury (co-authors Elizabeth Stokoe, Sue Ziebland and Paul Aveyard) described a study which had used conversational analysis to explore the language used by GPs in delivering a brief weight loss intervention and in how patients responded. Findings suggested that there may be unexpected clues to be picked up in language, which could make a real difference to GP effectiveness, even in very brief consultations.”

Presentations were given by Miriam Santer, Emma Teasdale, Clare McDermott, Sarah Stevens, Beth Stuart, Mairead Murphy, Ben Feakins, Charlotte Albury, Kamal Mahtani, Richeal Burns, Maria Panagioti, Ben Ainsworth, Rupert Payne, Kome Gbinigie, Xiao-Yang Hu, and Athena Ip.

Helen Stokes-Lampard’s suggestion for an increased amount of ‘silver standard’ research done quickly, rather than ‘gold standard’ research done more slowly gave me (and I think others in the audience) pause for thought. To me it spoke to the need for researchers to be open to designing practical research studies to answer questions that policy-makers need answered, within their time frames.

Dr Mairead Murphy, University of Bristol


Read more and view the SPCR funded studies

Chair of the RCGP Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard with Susan Jebb, Professor of Diet and Population Health at the University of Oxford.
Roads to Recovery: Organisation and Quality of Stroke Services

Roads to Recovery brings together recent evidence relevant to those planning and delivering stroke services, those delivering treatments to people with stroke and to those living with stroke. Together with other evidence, this review may be particularly useful for those developing stroke pathways and care across a system. It is not a comprehensive review of all evidence on stroke care; it focuses on studies funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). Over the last ten years, the NIHR has funded a number of programmes, projects, research centres, workstreams and researchers working in stroke prevention, management and care. These different studies have not been brought together in this way before. This review celebrates the range of recent studies on stroke care funded by NIHR in the last ten years. During this time we have seen a great increase in the volume of stroke studies and the numbers of patients, staff and organisations participating in stroke research. This has strengthened the base of what we know about how best to organise care. Read the review.

SPCR STUDIES FEATURED IN THE REVIEW INCLUDE:

Ongoing impairments following transient ischaemic attack: retrospective cohort study. Grace Turner.

This study used the Health Improvement Network database, which covers approximately 6% of the UK population to examine life after a transient ischaemic attack (TIA). A total of 9419 TIA patients and 46,511 controls were included, who were matched for age, sex and general practice. Results showed that compared with controls, TIA patients had an increased risk of 43% for consulting for fatigue, 26% for psychological impairment and 45% for cognitive impairment. For example, 25% of TIA patients consulted for psychological impairment within 7.1 months, compared with 23.5 months for controls. The authors argued that TIA is associated with subsequent GP consultation for three major impairments. This has implications for long-term care and treatment.

Identifying the long-term needs of stroke survivors using the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. Kethakie Sumathipala.

This study explored the long-term impact of stroke through a series of interviews with 35 stroke survivors between 1 and 11 years after stroke. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health framework (ICF) was used to contextualise the needs. Long-term needs included activities of daily living, housing, mobility, social participation, financial support, information, rehabilitation and transport. A key facilitator for functioning was social support. Patients often experience health problems not related to stroke as well. The authors concluded that in order to meet long-term needs a range of personal, contextual and environmental factors should be taken into consideration.
Herbal medicine for comprehensive patient care

The use of herbal medicine as part of comprehensive patient care is becoming widespread worldwide and the World Health Organization now recognises the international need for more integrated policies on herbal medicine use. Although herbal medicines are readily available to the public and are becoming increasingly popular, rigorous research into their safety, effectiveness and quality is still urgently needed in order to inform public policy and clinical decision-making.

Researchers from the University of Southampton (UoS) presented the findings from studies on complementary and herbal medicine at the European Congress for Integrated Medicine (ECIM) and International Congress for Complementary & Integrative Medicine Research (ICCMR) conference in Berlin in early May. Over 800 researchers, clinical providers, educators, healthcare professionals, commissioners and students heard about the latest research conducted in the field of complementary medicine and participated in methodological and practical workshops. The programme of herbal research conducted in Southampton contains two broad themes – firstly the evaluation of herbal medicines for conditions where alternatives are urgently needed in primary care, and secondly on improving methodological rigor of herbal research.

Professor Michael Moore, an invited keynote speaker, presented an overview of the antibiotic crisis and the potential role for herbal medicine for antibiotic sparing in acute self limiting illness. Much of this work has been funded by the School (ATAFUTI Uva ursi clinical trial, pelargonium feasibility study and the andrographis review).

One of the biggest motivations supporting herbal medicine research, according to Dr Xiao-Yang (Mio) Hu from Primary Care and Population Sciences at UoS, is the evolving global threat to public health of Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR). The reduction of antibiotic prescribing is now a major priority for the government and the NIHR, and research at the University of Southampton aims to evaluate the effectiveness of herbal medicines as a strategy for reducing the use of antibiotics. Under this theme, Mio presented findings of a recent SPCR funded systematic review on Andrographis Paniculata (Chuān Xin Lián) for symptomatic relief of acute respiratory tract infections (RTIs), conducted in collaboration with the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine. Acute RTIs are predominantly of viral aetiology and antibiotics are of very limited benefit in the majority of uncomplicated infections. The marginal benefit of antibiotics for RTIs are outweighed by increasing AMR and common adverse reactions leading to unnecessary increases in healthcare costs. Apart from providing a potential alternative for RTIs, this review emphasised the importance - and barriers - of including trials published in Chinese.

Among the workshop presenters was former SPCR trainee, Dr Lily Lai, who was supervised by the late Professor George Lewith during her PhD studies on Chinese herbal medicine. The findings from her PhD research were presented in two workshops in Berlin alongside work currently conducted by Dr. Andrew Flower and Dr. Merlin Willcox. The first workshop ‘Herbal medicine research: from margins to mainstream’ explored the different research methods used to investigate herbal medicines. The key domains of herbal medicine research such as quality control, batch consistency, interactions with pharmaceuticals, model validity and herbal pharmacokinetics were highlighted and Lily hopes the workshop helped develop models for future research into herbal medicines: “We envisage these models being able to incorporate appropriately phased projects to form an iterative programme of research. This will optimise pragmatic rigour as well as highlight the clinical relevance of these investigations.”

During the second workshop, the same team from UoS presented alongside colleagues at UCL and Geneva on how to prioritise traditional treatments for further research. Lily spoke about the role of consensus-seeking methods as a way of informing clinical trial protocols. Mio presented on criteria for selecting herbal medicines which will be used to form a standardised guideline of prioritising herbal interventions for systematic reviews. Participants explored the roles of these novel methods when prioritising plants for further research and critically examined proposed models on defining good practice in herbal-prescribing.

Lily hopes the workshop demonstrated that rigorous approaches can be used thoughtfully to answer clinically meaningful research questions. “The overall aim is to begin building an evidence-base on herbal medicine that is relevant internationally with the end-goal in mind that this evidence will help healthcare commissioners, healthcare professionals and patients make more informed decisions regarding herbal use.”
It is with great sadness that we pay tribute to George Lewith, Professor of Primary Care at the University of Southampton, and SPCR training lead, supervisor and mentor. George died suddenly on 17 March.

George made remarkable contributions to academic primary care and in particular to research in the area of complementary medicine. As a training lead, mentor and supervisor for the School, he will be remembered for his endless enthusiasm, generosity and leadership. George’s wealth of knowledge and experience as a GP and academic was combined with considerable personal integrity, humility and sense of humour. His inspiration and sound guidance will be greatly missed by colleagues from across the School, but in particular the School’s trainees whom he mentored and supervised with tireless passion and commitment.

“George encouraged those around him to think openly, to listen critically and to pursue everything with infectious enthusiasm, compassion and most importantly a sense of humour. Perhaps what most of us will remember George for though is his unwavering support and generosity to everyone around him, and his ability to find the time to fit in a phone call or a meeting in spite of the plates he was already spinning. On a personal note, it has been both an honour and an absolute joy to have worked so closely with George. He will be sorely missed and the impact of his work will continue to inspire generations of academics and clinicians to come.”

Dr Lily Lai, former SPCR trainee.
**Recent publications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>DOI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief pain re-assessment provided more accurate prognosis than baseline information for low-back or shoulder pain.</td>
<td>G. Mansell, K. P. Jordan, G. M. Peat, K. M. Dunn, D. Lasserson, T. Kuijpers and D. A. W. M. van der Windt</td>
<td>BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders</td>
<td>10.1186/s12891-017-1502-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative study to explore the health and well-being impacts on adults providing informal support to female domestic violence survivors.</td>
<td>Alison Gregory, Gene Feder, Ann Taket, Emma Williamson</td>
<td>BMJ Open</td>
<td>10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling problems among patients in primary care: a cross-sectional study of general practices.</td>
<td>Sean Cowlishaw, Lone Gale, Alison Gregory, Jim McCambridge and David Kessler</td>
<td>BJGP</td>
<td>10.3399/bjgp17X689905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do older people experiencing loneliness think about primary care or community based interventions to reduce loneliness? A qualitative study in England.</td>
<td>Kalpa Kharicha, Steve Iliffe, Jill Manthorpe, Carolyn A. Chew-Graham, Mima Cattan, Claire Goodman, Maggie Kirby-Barr, Janet H. Whitehouse, Kate Walters</td>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>10.1111/hsc.12438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rEHR: An R package for manipulating and analysing Electronic Health Record data.</td>
<td>David A. Springate, Rosa Parisi, Ivan Olier, David Reeves, Evangelos Kontopantelis</td>
<td>PLOS One</td>
<td>10.1371/journal.pone.0171784</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School for Primary Care Research**

**Pre-Grant Patient and Public Involvement workshops**

**Find out more**
School for Primary Care Research

Developing skills for patient and public involvement

Post-graduate training day for SPCR member institutions.

SPCR working groups for funding round 16

The following working groups have been established to assist in collaboration on grant proposals for FR16.

More information on each working group is now available on the website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Group</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ageing and the health and care of older people</td>
<td>Louise Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief behavioural and psychological interventions</td>
<td>Kieran Ayling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation analysis</td>
<td>Geraldine Leydon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital health</td>
<td>Nadia Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving patients and families in improving the quality &amp; safety of healthcare</td>
<td>Susan Hrisos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Carolyn Chew-Graham or Rachel Duncan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>Alice Malpass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palliative and end of life care</td>
<td>Stephen Barclay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient and public involvement</td>
<td>Emma Palmer-Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the evidence base for general practice based pharmacists</td>
<td>Benjamin Fletcher and Ali Albasri</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institute of Health & Society
Newcastle University

Wednesday, 7 June
10am - 4.30pm

For more information, contact Beth Bareham:
b.k.bareham@newcastle.ac.uk

SPCR Post-graduate training day for SPCR member institutions.

Institute of Health & Society
Newcastle University

Wednesday, 7 June
10am - 4.30pm

For more information, contact Beth Bareham:
b.k.bareham@newcastle.ac.uk
NIHR Strategic Priority: pushing the pace of research

NIHR ‘Health Futures’ 20 year forward view
Professor Chris Whitty and Dr Louise Wood

University of Manchester
is looking for a Senior Lecturer to lead work focused on health policy, organisation and management, the impact of health policy, as well as service planning, organisation and delivery.

NIHR Funding and support round-up
April 2017

NIHR news and research

Keele University
The Institute for Primary Care and Health Sciences (iPCHS) is recruiting for +3 ESRC postgraduate studentships. Research topic: ‘Healthy Work Life Expectancy’

NIHR funding alert

More information
Deadline: 5 May 2017

NIHR update for primary care
March 2017

NIHR funding alert

The NIHR encourages you to “get digital” with the launch of the Let’s Get Digital Competition.

Read more and enter.
Dates for your diary

Developing skills for patient and public involvement
7 June 2017. More information
Newcastle University.

Digital Health Working Group Meeting
22 June 2017. More information
UCL. Contact: nadia.jackson@ucl.ac.uk

SAPC Annual meeting
12 - 14 July 2017
University of Warwick

SPCR Trainees meeting
18-19 September 2017
Worcester College
University of Oxford

SPCR Showcase: Working better together
19 September 2017
University of Oxford

NIHR Trainees meeting
14-15 November 2017
Queen’s Hotel
Leeds

Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Primary Care (Education and Research)
Closing date: 16 May 2017

Research Fellow/Senior Research Fellow in Primary Care
Closing date: 16 May 2017

Blogs

Exchanging skills and ideas with students from across the School
Charlotte Albury, University of Oxford

It’s false to believe that antibiotic resistance is only a problem in hospitals – GP surgeries are seeing it too
Oliver van Hecke & Chris Butler, University of Oxford

Researchers: To make an impact, write less and talk more
Lesley Wye, University of Bristol

Learning from the experts: Clinical academic training
Annabelle Machin & Randula Haththot, Keele University

World Health Day 2017 – ‘Depression: let’s talk’
David Kessler, University of Bristol

Using systematic reviews to reduce research waste—who really cares?
Kamal Mahtani, University of Oxford

Why gender can’t be ignored when dealing with domestic violence
Gene Feder & Lucy Potter, University of Bristol

The BJGP would like to involve a number of younger clinical and non-clinical primary care academics in the work of the Editorial Board of the BJGP and in the developing editorial structures of the recently-launched on line open access journal, BJGP Open.

The BJGP is looking for academics in the first years of their careers in general practice who have interests in writing, reviewing, critical appraisal or publishing. Read the letter from BJGP Editor Professor Roger Jones.