Centre for Academic Mental Health

Research Strategy

Context

The Centre for Academic Mental Health (CAMH) is part of the School of Social and Community Medicine (SSCM) within the Faculty of Health Sciences. The Centre aims to promote high quality research and teaching on mental health within the School, the wider University and externally. Moreover, the Centre seeks to provide a sense of belonging, coherence and common purpose for academics working on mental health research across the School.

Our research is multidisciplinary and collaborative bringing together expertise in psychiatry, epidemiology, primary care, public health, psychology, statistics, and social science.

Current research strengths

Our current major research strengths comprise seven main areas summarised below:

1. Management of common mental disorders in primary care – this research focuses on the clinical and cost-effectiveness of interventions for individuals with depression and anxiety in primary care. This work also includes the application of new technologies and understanding of psychological interventions based on findings from basic cognitive science (leads: Kessler and Wiles).

2. Epidemiology of depression and neurodevelopmental disorders – this includes studies on maternal depression and its impact on child development, depression in childhood and adolescence, and work on neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism (leads: Evans, Joinson and Rai).

3. Suicide and self-harm – this research focuses on understanding the causes of suicide and suicidal behaviour in order to inform clinical and population prevention strategies. A key local resource is the Bristol self-harm surveillance register (leads: Gunnell and Moran).


5. Psychosis/Schizophrenia - this work focuses on the aetiology of schizophrenia and of mechanisms underlying the development of psychotic experiences in childhood and their trajectory through to clinical disorder in adulthood (lead: Zammit).

6. Personality Disorder – this work focuses on the epidemiology and treatment of personality disorders and associated co-morbidity. The research spans descriptive epidemiological studies, feasibility studies of novel interventions, large multi-centre trials of complex psychological interventions, as well as the evaluation of national services for people with personality disorder (lead: Moran).

7. Clinical Neuroscience - our clinical research into neuro-psychiatric disorders combines pharmacological and physiological approaches, with a particular emphasis on depression,
anxiety, sleep disorders, mood disorders co-morbid with physical health problems (lead: Potokar).

As well as strengths in these specific areas, our research utilises a wide range of relevant methodologies including life-course and genetic epidemiology, health economics, statistics, qualitative research methods and anthropological/ethnographic approaches. We have a strong track record in conducting large multi-centre randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and a particular strength in evidence synthesis utilising a variety of methods to address questions on a broad range of mental health topics including treatments, prevalence, risk factors, harms, and decision-making.

Environment

We exploit the rich longitudinal data from the Bristol-based Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) in a wide ranging programme of work investigating a range of mental health outcomes. RCTs evaluating complex interventions benefit from the high-quality cutting edge methodological research that takes place within the MRC funded ConDuCT-II (Collaboration and innovation for Difficult and Complex Randomised Trials) Hub and well established links with the UK-CRC registered Bristol Randomised Trials Collaboration (BRTC). Neuroscience research benefits from the cross-disciplinary expertise and facilities in the University and its partner hospitals that are brought together by Bristol Neuroscience (BN).

Goals for the next 5 years

- To continue to promote and improve the national and international profile of mental health research undertaken within the Centre both internally (within the School and wider University) and externally.
- To actively seek opportunities to expand our research and build expertise in currently unexploited areas of research by taking advantage of the rich range of resources and expertise available locally (e.g. ALSPAC, MRC IEU unit, NIHR CLAHRCwest, DECIPHer, NIHR Schools of Primary Care and Public Health and, Bristol Neuroscience).
- To strengthen links with local universities (e.g. University of the West of England (UWE), Cardiff University and University of Swansea) and take advantage of opportunities arising from the Great West 4 (GW4) collaboration (Universities of Bath, Bristol Cardiff and Exeter).
- To strengthen and expand public involvement in our research through links with the research networks, the Elizabeth Blackwell Institute for Health Research public advisory group and the People and Research South West initiative based at UWE.
- To increase the impact of our research by dissemination to relevant policy makers and using local Health Integration Teams and the CLAHRCwest to translate relevant findings into practice.
- To continue to work with local NHS Trusts, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Any Qualified Providers (AQP)s, and statutory bodies in order to inform research and promote translation of findings into clinical practice and health policy.
• To increase the capacity for mental health research within the School.
• To increase the number of doctoral and post-doctoral studentships and fellowships awarded to staff within the Centre.
• To increase the number of multi-centre randomised controlled trials conducted by the Centre to address clinically important questions.
• To increase the proportion of funding from long-term grants (e.g. NIHR programme grants for applied research).

Strategy

Firstly, the Centre will continue to build on existing strengths and take advantage of new opportunities relating to those that have arisen from recent developments in the School (such as funding of the MRC IEU unit and NIHR CLAHRC west, and the establishment of Health Integration Teams (HITs)). In addition, the Centre’s members will:

1. Ensure that our research continues to be published in leading international journals and is presented at all relevant national and international conferences.
2. Publicise our work through the Centre, School and University websites, and other media.
3. Arrange a monthly seminar series to provide opportunities for networking with colleagues based locally and elsewhere.
4. Hold biannual research meetings to showcase our work and promote a common identity for those working on mental health research across the School.
5. Encourage wide collaboration across the School, Faculties and externally in order to develop innovative programmes of research that stand the best chance in the competitive funding climate.
6. Encourage and support all staff to develop new skills through training opportunities available both locally and elsewhere, and in applications for externally funded fellowships to ensure opportunities for career development.

Last updated: 21 September 2015