

REMEDY

**Working
Together to
Embed Values
of Equality,
Diversity and
Inclusivity**

Inside:

*Myth Busting
During COVID-19*

*Engaging BAME
Communities in the
COVID-19 Vaccination
Programme*



Welcome

Welcome to the 35th Edition of ReMEDy.

Since our last publication in October 2020, the world is still living with restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. With the roll out of several different vaccines to combat this pandemic there is now real hope that we will be able to return to greater social interaction over time.

In this edition, we explore and highlight how staff and students are rising to the challenges of working and studying during such difficult times. There are so many things I could mention here but I am very proud that so many of our students, including our C21 north Wales students, have been volunteering in vaccination centres across Wales to support the mammoth effort to bring this pandemic under control.

With having to adapt many of our activities during the pandemic, using a variety of online tools. It has been a steep learning curve for everyone (teaching, admissions, assessments, placements, public engagement etc) made a little easier by the endeavours of colleagues Professor Marcus Coffey and Drs Duncan Cole and Athanasios Hassoulas from the Digital Education Group, who organised and hosted a successful series of workshops for staff and students providing additional teaching/learning and technical support on the remote delivery of teaching and assessment. Everyone across the School has really worked so hard to provide as good a student experience as we can under these circumstances – I thank you all.

The main feature highlights some of the ongoing initiatives that are being driven by our Student Staff Race Equality Task Group, alongside students in the African Caribbean Medical Association (ACMA), Cardiff Healthcare International Perspectives Society (CHIPS) and MedSoc. This work is of paramount importance to the School as we continue



Our students supporting the vaccination effort at Pentwyn Mass Vaccination Centre

to embed our equality, diversity and inclusivity values, ensuring that students from all backgrounds are meaningfully supported. There are conversations about how curricula need to change to recognise our inherent diversity taking place at many of the medical education meetings I attend – I welcome these discussions and support them at every opportunity. I hope we continue to walk this path and develop solutions together.

Our popular alumnus conversation feature is with Dr Eli Wyatt, who graduated in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and is now an F1 doctor in Glan Clywd Hospital. We have a feature on the work of some of our students to combat COVID-19 misinformation supported by colleagues Drs Athanasios Hassoulas and Eliana Panayiotou, as well as the excellent work of Muslim Doctors Cymru involving Drs Bnar Talabani and Mohammad Alhadj Ali to engage BAME communities in the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Finally, this edition's fantastic front cover image was created by fourth year undergraduate medical student Abhay Ghaiwal, responding to a call to create some resources for small children who were fearful of seeing medical staff wearing full PPE. This is one of several images created by students reflecting PPE as part of a superhero costume which has helped children to feel more confident and happier about meeting with medical staff during the pandemic.

ReMEDy is available electronically to the School's alumni and to ensure that you receive your copy, please inform us if you have changed your contact email address.



Update your details now:

www.cardiff.ac.uk/alumni-update

I hope you enjoy reading this edition and it finds you safe and well. Thanks to all of my colleagues across the School, University and the NHS for their continued support.



Professor Stephen Riley
(MD 2003, MBBCh 1993)
Dean, School of Medicine

In Conversation with...

Dr Eli Wyatt (MBBCh 2020)

Eli currently works as a foundation year 1 doctor at Glan Clwyd Hospital, working on the renal ward, following a few redeployments to help on COVID wards.



A regular day includes a board round, followed by a ward round with/without a consultant and a collection of jobs to complete. However, even before graduating Eli had become a volunteer in the fight against COVID-19 and began to assist in any way that she could at Glan Clwyd Hospital. Eli says: "The year since graduation has been a complete whirlwind having graduated during a global pandemic! I have learned and experienced an awful lot in a relatively short space of time, having made strong bonds with other healthcare professionals in work."

On being asked why Eli chose Cardiff, she explains: "There are many reasons. I wanted to stay in Wales, it meant I could remain close to my grandparents, whom we were supporting as a family. I am also a Welsh speaker so for me, I wanted to be able to use some of my Welsh when completing placements etc. The curriculum style suited me with lots of hands-on experience and case-based learning. I also played netball to a high standard and wanted to keep it up during my university years. I had heard that the university team was really good and there were plenty of clubs to join in and outside of Cardiff University."

As an undergraduate student, Eli describes her most favourite memory from her fifth-year medical elective where she volunteered for a charity in Namibia to help with rural healthcare. She said: "The charity I helped also run a few wildlife sanctuaries around Namibia, so I had the privilege of getting involved with the wildlife there too. I have many memories from this time, assisting

malnourished and neglected children and adults, whilst also remembering my time caring for many and varied wildlife such as baboons, cheetahs, meerkats and so much more. I felt privileged being able to see the huge difference in rural healthcare over there compared to here and it reminded me of how lucky we really are with our NHS."

Reflecting on how Cardiff School of Medicine contributed to her success, Eli mentions: "Cardiff University helped to equip me with the key skills needed to become an ever-developing junior doctor. Although nothing could have prepared me to begin working during a global pandemic, I feel that many vital skills that supported me through, had been developed during my time in Cardiff University, and for that, I am hugely grateful."

Eli concludes: "Looking back I am so impressed how well Cardiff University School of Medicine coped when the pandemic became apparent. Fifth year students were scattered all over the World on their electives and we were kept fully informed in a very professional manner. They made what was a scary and unpredictable time feel well constructed and thought out."



Eli's shared alumni wisdom:

"Don't put so much pressure on yourself to know/learn everything. Medicine is one of the few careers where you never stop learning, so there is plenty of time. Medical school is for giving you the foundations to build upon in future."

"Learning, training and working in a global pandemic has brought to light additional uncertainties, changes and challenges. Be proud of yourselves and know that it is always ok to ask for help."

Eli's five words describing Cardiff School of Medicine:

Supportive

Friendly

Resourceful

Engaging

Multi-cultural



In the Spotlight:

The Masters in Wound Healing and Tissue Repair Programme

The Masters in Wound Healing and Tissue Repair is a well-established three-year, inter-disciplinary, part-time, distance-learning programme.

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught/courses/course/wound-healing-and-tissue-repair-msc-part-time>

The programme began as a postgraduate diploma in 1996, later becoming a Masters in 1999. The programme attracts healthcare professionals from fields such as nursing, medicine, pharmacy and podiatry, and offers the opportunity to study online alongside an international group of students from around the globe. The programme has over two decades of success with teaching supported by a range of international, inter-professional experts in wound healing and tissue repair. Since the programme began there have been almost 350 graduates including 184 MSc, 130 Postgraduate Diploma and 34 Postgraduate Certificate awards. The majority of students are from the UK, however over the last two years there has been an increase in the range of countries represented including; Belgium, Switzerland, Netherlands, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, USA and Isle of Man.

In September the programme rose to the challenge of the pandemic by providing all teaching online, rather than having a 5-day, face-to-face, study block on campus. Whilst this tested the resilience of all individuals involved the switch to being completely remote has been a success, with an increase in student numbers for Year 1. This achievement would not have been possible without the dedication of all the individuals involved with the delivery of the programme – thank you!

The Team



Samantha Holloway

Samantha Holloway is the full-time Programme Director for the Masters in Wound Healing and Tissue Repair having taken up the role in 2008. Samantha's external activities include being a member of the European Wound Management Association (EWMA) Council, Chair of the EWMA Education Committee and Chair of the EWMA Teacher Network. The most recent work of the EWMA Education Committee has been the development of level 5-7 wound management curricula for post-registration nurses across Europe (<https://ewma.org/what-we-do/education/ewma-curricula>). The Education Committee is currently working on the development of a Level 4 curriculum for pre-registration nurses that should be available by the Autumn of this year. Samantha is also the President-Elect for the International Skin Tear Advisory Panel (ISTAP) who are working towards a vision of 'a world without skin tears' (<http://www.skintears.org>). Samantha commences her role as President of ISTAP in May 2022 with education being a key focus of the panel in the forthcoming years.



Sian Edney

Sian Edney supports the Masters in Wound Healing and Tissue Repair programme, working with Samantha one day per week and the Masters in Psychiatry programme two days per week. Sian has experience in Business Psychology and Human Economics, Organisational Change, Psychometric Testing as well as Quality and Continuous Improvement methodologies. Sian is the Module Lead for the Behavioural (Psycho-Social) Aspects of Wound Healing and also assists with a number of the other Year 1 modules.



Joseph Frenkel

The programme is also supported by a diverse range of staff from across the School of Medicine who provide specialist input for the syllabus. For example; Assessment of Pain (Sue Jenkins and Richard Day, C4ME), Inflammation Activation and Resolution (Dr Natacha Ipseiz, Division of Infection & Immunity), Effects of stress, anxiety and psychological theories in relation to wound healing (Dr Athanasios Hassoulas, C4ME), Statistical Concepts (Dr Katja Umla Runge, C4ME) and Nutrition and wound healing (Justine Bold, C4ME). The expert contributions of these individuals has strengthened the curriculum and has contributed to the high levels of student satisfaction year on year.



Dr Adisaputra Ramadhinara

The continued success of the programme can also be attributed to the highly valued pool of Honorary Title Holders that has been built up over the last 12 years. These individuals are mainly, but not solely, graduates of the programme, who after completion have been keen to maintain ongoing links to the programme, most commonly because of their overwhelming positive experience and their desire to support other students. The programme now has over 50 individuals who provide support for teaching in terms of core lectures and live question and answer sessions. They also contribute to the curriculum by providing specialist input to the syllabus and updating module content. Their contribution to the assessment activities is also invaluable. The programme has been commended on the international diversity of its Honorary Title Holders. There isn't enough space to list them individually but here a few individuals from across the globe who have supported the programme over the last 3 years.



Marlene Varga

- Joseph Frenkel, Podiatrist, Wound Care Consultant, Melbourne, Australia.
- Dr Adisaputra Ramadhinara, Wound Specialist Physician, Jakarta.
- Marlene Varga, Pressure Injury Prevention Lead, Canada.

Myth Busting During COVID-19

One of the many challenges that healthcare professionals have encountered during the pandemic is the amount of false information being circulated at an alarming rate. The spread of such misinformation can have a damaging impact on public perception of, and confidence in, key public health campaigns.

Various misrepresentations and inaccuracies have been doing the rounds, specifically on social media, regarding the origins of the virus, how it is spread, and the science underpinning the vaccines that have recently been developed. In response to the misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories being propagated, a few of our medical students have stepped up to the mark by creating a range of engaging resources aimed at debunking some common myths, as well as striving to provide support to those who may be feeling anxious or low at this time.

Dr Athanasios Hassoulas worked with a team of year one C21 students in disseminating a suite of informative resources that include a patient information leaflet, a public health pamphlet, and a student-led video dissecting unverifiable claims. The patient information leaflet, created by year one C21 students Meghan Edwards and Sanya Trikha, was designed to be distributed on social media and in primary care settings.

The leaflet challenges certain myths being perpetuated, provides information about the nature of the COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the UK, and aims to manage the public's expectations in relation to how the vaccination programme is being rolled out.

In addition to the leaflet, a public health pamphlet was designed by year one C21 students Praveena Pemmasani, Molly Sherriff, Je Yin Chooi and Rebecca James, with guidance from Consultant Paediatrician Dr Eliana Panayiotou.

The aim of the pamphlet is to dispel false claims being circulated on social media about the nature of the vaccine, by providing a lay summary of how the vaccine works and signposting the public to reliable sources of information.

Adding further to the suite of myth-debunking resources, year one C21 student Anna Thomas created an engaging and informative video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BU9A21JIGIQ>) whereby she systematically dissects false claims being promoted on numerous social media platforms. Anna's professional and evidence-based approach to appraising and challenging false claims, made on the nature of the virus and the vaccination development process, has

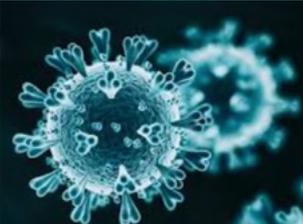
INFORMATION ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME

What you should know about the vaccine



Praveena Pemmasani, Molly Sherriff, Je Yin Chooi, Rebecca James,
Dr Athanasios Hassoulas & Dr Eliana Panayiotou
School of Medicine
Cardiff University

received praise from staff on the C21 programme. Her video has been viewed hundreds of times and has been shared by numerous healthcare professionals as part of ongoing efforts to empower the general public in distinguishing false information from fact.



The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

How to protect yourselves and others during the pandemic

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
Megan Edwards, Sanya Trikha,
Dr Athanasios Hassoulas
PRIIFYSGOL CAERDYF School of Medicine
Cardiff University

Myth Debunking!

MYTH: COVID VACCINE WILL ALTER MY GENETIC CODE

FACT: The COVID vaccine cannot alter any genetic material but has one main job: to instruct the body on how to fight the virus.

MYTH: I DON'T NEED THE VACCINE BECAUSE I HAVE ALREADY HAD COVID

FACT: Natural immunity varies from person to person, with early evidence suggesting that natural immunity may not last very long. Re-infection is therefore possible.

The vaccine will still be offered to you if you have already had COVID-19, and you are still encouraged to get vaccinated.

MYTH: SIDE EFFECTS FROM THE VACCINE ARE WORSE THAN HAVING THE VIRUS

FACT: Most side effects are very mild; ranging from a sore arm for a day or two at the site of the injection, to muscle aches and a mild fever. This means that the vaccine is working and is training your immune system to protect you from the virus. If you have pre-existing conditions or you are taking certain medications, you could also have a chat with your GP to discuss any concerns you may have.

Vaccine Benefits

The COVID vaccine provides us all with protection from the virus.

After receiving both doses of the vaccine, we will once again be able to meet with our loved ones and not worry about spreading coronavirus.

The vaccine can help the country get back to the normal activities of daily life!






Working Together to Embed Values of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity

2020, was a challenging and difficult year, from the onslaught of COVID-19 to the reignition of Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, after the tragic death of George Floyd with his final words 'I can't breathe'. His death was a catalyst for the numerous protests that sprouted globally in Spring 2020, bringing the topic of racism to the forefront of the general public's attention.

Individuals across different sectors highlighted the barriers they face with systemic racial inequalities and within medicine this was no different for both healthcare professionals and patients alike. Traditionally in the UK, medical education has a Eurocentric perspective, particularly obvious in more visual specialties such as dermatology, however this persists throughout all specialties in medicine. This lack of diversity fails to prepare trainees to care for a growing multicultural society in a patient centred manner.

At the School of Medicine, concerns surrounding racism have been raised in the past and in 2017 an independent review provided 13 recommendations in areas of policy, training, and professional development. Following this, there was a renewed commitment towards equality, diversity and inclusion.

In response to and empowered by the BLM movement and protests, passionate Cardiff medical students were engaged with this discourse and collaborated to organise open letters about curriculum changes with regards to race, and a document formulated by the African Caribbean Medical Association (ACMA) provided recommendations in areas such as equality, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) training, tackling micro-aggressions, updating the Raising Concerns policy, and changing the culture.

To address these proposals in a cohesive manner, the medical school responded favourably, and the Cardiff MEDIC Student Staff Race Equality Task Group was created in the new academic year. This includes staff from various disciplines as well as student representatives from six societies, representing different religions,



Figure 1: Committee members

ethnicities, and the overall student body as well as a student British Medical Association (BMA) representative. A member of the wider university EDI team is invited to provide an outside perspective and accountability. They meet six times in an academic year with the flexibility to hold ad hoc meetings if a time-critical issue arises. Other staff members are also invited depending on the focus of each task group meeting, with student surveys distributed where relevant before meetings to get a wider perspective.

The remit of the task group is to discuss and create action plans around certain key points proposed by the student body on how to improve racial equality within the medical school, the medical student environment and the curriculum. They advocate for and ensure racial equity and representation in the faculty and the student body.

Their initial focus for this academic year has been prioritising the concerns raised in the open letters and advisory documents, starting to decolonise the undergraduate curriculum and promoting racial equality across the medical school. For example, the Raising Concerns policy was amended to include examples of

religious and racial discrimination, and Cardiff University School of Medicine also signed the BMA Charter to commit formally to preventing and addressing racial harassment.

Decolonising the curriculum, an ongoing project has concentrated on three specialties this year: dermatology, obstetrics & gynaecology and psychiatry. These specialties were chosen to introduce small improvements within each phase whilst ensuring that the core curriculum was maintained. In Phase 1 the aim was to encourage discussions in Case Based Learning by supporting facilitators and students in discussions looking at racial disparities and how patients might experience different outcomes. In Phases 2 and 3 resources were added offering a more diverse image bank, as well as an e-module looking at maternal health outcomes.

In April, members of the Task Group hosted a Race Awareness Day virtual event spread over two days to have these often difficult discussions. Each day comprised of three to four parallel workshops that staff and students attended, sandwiched between two plenaries. The aim of the event was to enhance our staff and students' understanding of allyship and the global perspective of cultural diversity in healthcare that exist in today's world. A broad range of speakers were invited on each day to present different topics about race and cultural awareness, through the use of workshops and plenaries.

This coming December, some members will also deliver a workshop for the Developing Excellence in Medical Education Conference (DEMEC). This is a great opportunity for the medical school to showcase the work they are doing on a national level. It will be attended by clinicians and educators in the medical education community with the aim of

encouraging positive and sustainable transformation. The workshop will involve looking at strategies for improving race equality in healthcare institutions with the hope of identifying barriers to facilitating conversations about race.

A major achievement of the Task Group has been the establishment of collaborative student-staff working relationships with increased trust and transparency. This has allowed open discussions with key contacts and the use of protected speaking time helps to both create a 'safe space' for discussions, and ensure all voices are valued equally. Although opinions can differ, a diverse membership means a wide variety of perspectives are considered and any agreed action points are likely to be acceptable to all key stakeholders.

However, as a newly formed working group, there have also been challenges. Differing expectations of what is achievable within certain timeframes has caused frustration, with the need to balance constraints on staff workloads and time versus wanting immediate change. There was a recognition that shorter-term goals are more realistic and an appreciation that for cultural change to be embedded into the fabric of the school, a longer-term strategy would be required. The task group is committed to implementing changes that are sustainable and dynamic, with a desire to change mindsets with regards to race rather than introduce 'tick-box' exercises.

Overall, the Task Group is and will continue to be significant in improving medical education with respect to race and ethnicity at Cardiff University medical school. The ultimate goal is to produce generations of doctors who are both confident and competent in providing care to a constantly evolving, multicultural population, and the Task Group will be key to achieving this. They would encourage any current medical student and alumni to get involved and support the work they are doing.

SCHEDULE OF THE DAY

	<p>1:45 PM - 2:00 PM STUDENTS AND STAFF SIGN IN</p> <p>2:00 PM - 2:45 PM WELCOME AND PLENARY</p> <p>2:45 PM - 3:00 PM SHORT 15 MIN BREAK</p> <p>3:00 PM - 4:20 PM WORKSHOP</p> <p>4:20 PM - 5:00 PM BREAK TIME</p> <p>5:00 PM - 6:00 PM LIVE PLENARY AND CLOSING</p>	
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To find out more about this event please visit the following link:
<https://medicraceawarenessday.wordpress.com>

10 ways

MEDIC is MAKING an IMPACT

The School of Medicine has a successful track record of contributing to society through its Research, Learning and Teaching, Innovation and Public Engagement and Involvement activity. Efforts by many staff and students highlight a rich variety of ways in which the School is engaging and benefitting society. Here are just ten recent examples:

1 E-Guide Promotes Good Mental Health During COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to all our lives, which in turn has had a profound impact on our collective mental wellbeing. Dr Athanasios Hassoulas, MSc Psychiatry Programme Director, has worked with year 3 medical students Srinjay Mukhopadhyay and Ravanth Baskaran in developing an open-access mental health e-guide designed to provide remote support during this time.

The e-guide contains interactive exercises, videos, and tasks aimed at promoting good mental health and providing support to people of all age groups. The e-guide has been accessed by thousands of people across the UK and can be easily shared with anyone who you feel might be struggling at this time.

To access the e-guide, please follow the link: https://xerte.cardiff.ac.uk/play_12917

2 Science in Health Live Online 2021

This year's event for year 12 pupils took place virtually on 10th & 11th March, offering a combination of pre-recorded resources and four live online sessions. A total number of 464 registered and received the interactive programme with links to all resources.



Feedback was collected, both live and online, and of those who participated –

95% felt the event had helped them to further their future career goals

76% stated that they were more likely to study at Cardiff University after attending the event

70% strongly agreed that the event had inspired them towards a career in science in health.

3 The Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health

Established in 2020, brings together world-leading researchers to focus on reducing anxiety and depression in young people.

Although several of the Wolfson Centre's research workstreams have been impacted by delays associated with the pandemic, the Centre has already been busy in producing research papers and grants on the topic of young people's mental health as well as establishing its social media platforms and website.

Co-director, Professor Stephan Collishaw, said "Finding interventions and influencing policy that will help improve young people's mental health is a priority, particularly given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are looking forward to increasing the pace of our research endeavours and working with young people through our planned new focus group and key stakeholders on what research they'd like to see being developed."

4 Langerin Versus HIV

Research led by Dr Magdalena Czubala (Cardiff University), Miss Ghizlane Maarifi and Dr Fabien Blanchet (both from University of Montpellier) has shined a new light on the potential mechanism by which interferons can protect from sexual transmission of HIV. The research published in **Cellular & Molecular Immunology** described Langerin, a well-known surface receptor on Langerhans Cells, as a novel interferon inducible gene. Dr Czubala said:

"These are very exciting findings. Langerhans cells play an important role in HIV capture and killing, but also sexual transmission. Inducing Langerin on these cells could potentially increase efficiency of HIV capture and degradation, thus decrease chances of virus transmission between partners".

5 MEDIC Postgraduate Wins Prestigious Award

Postgraduate student Dr Charlotte Brown has won the prestigious Medawar Medal at the NHSBT British Transplantation Society 2021 congress. Charlotte won the award with her presentation entitled "Ischaemic preconditioning drives expansion of a protective cell population in the renal stroma".

Charlotte, a surgical trainee with an interest in transplantation, is on the verge of submitting her PhD thesis at Cardiff University and is supervised by a team of clinical and non-clinical investigators from the Wales Kidney Research Unit – Dr Soma Meran, Mr Usman Khalid, Dr Robert Steadman and Mr Rafael Chavez.

Her project investigates the role of the extracellular matrix polysaccharide Hyaluronan in the acute kidney injury to chronic kidney disease continuum and she has used in vivo models, developed by the research team to investigate mediators of renal injury.

6 Professor Adrian Edwards Appointed Director of New Wales COVID-19 Research Evidence Centre

Health and Care Research Wales has appointed Professor Adrian Edwards as the Director of the new Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre. This £3m centre is being created on behalf of Welsh Government to make use of UK-wide and international research findings to answer key questions and support decision making in Wales. This could include addressing the long-term effects of the pandemic and investigating challenges such as infection control and social distancing, the consequences of isolation and the health effects of the economic disruption.

The Centre will enable rapid access to key international research findings and evidence, so decisions can be made by Welsh Government and NHS Wales. It will also allow fast and focused research studies to be undertaken on a Welsh level, including into long COVID.

7 Two Awards for Pressure Ulcer-Sensing Mattress Topper

Cardiff medical student Luthfun Nessa and Harvard University data scientist Anna McGovern created CalidiScope - a pressure ulcer-sensing mattress topper which has won two top innovation awards totalling £40,500 in just two days.



First, Luthfun and Anna beat four other finalists to take the £10,000 prize fund in the **Institute of Global Health Innovation (IGHI)**'s annual **Health Innovation Awards**. Then, two days later, CalidiScope clinched **Imperial Enterprise Lab's Venture Catalyst Challenge**, winning £30,000 plus the audience prize of £500.

CalidiScope hopes to significantly improve the prevention strategy for patients at risk of developing a pressure ulcer by helping nurses to personalise patient care.

8 Scientists Develop Rapid Test for Diagnosis of Rare Set of Genetic Conditions

This research led by Professor Duncan Baird at Cardiff University School of Medicine and Professor Tom Vulliamy at Queen Mary University of London is published in the journal **Human Genetics**.

Telomeropathies are caused by premature shortening of the tips of chromosomes, the DNA molecules which contain our genetic information. They can result in a range of symptoms, including bone marrow failure, pulmonary fibrosis, cancer and liver disease in adults and children. There are currently about 1,000 people living with telomeropathies in the UK, many of which are undetected. Professor Baird said:

"If a patient presents with a severe symptom such as bone marrow failure we can now test, more accurately and rapidly than ever before, if this is the result of a telomeropathy, thereby speeding up the process of providing a diagnosis for these patients."

9 Healthy Ramadan Cymru

Cardiff University's School of Medicine has partnered with Diabetes UK Cymru and Diabetes and Ramadan International Alliance (DAR) to run a series of 'Healthy Ramadan Cymru' webinars led by Dr Mohammad Alhadj Ali, Clinical Lecturer in Diabetes and Endocrinology. Dr Mohammad Alhadj Ali said:

"Estimates suggest that there are 148 million Muslims with diabetes worldwide and up to 79% of Muslims with diabetes fast for at least 15 days in Ramadan. Healthy Ramadan Cymru aims to provide health care professionals in Wales with the most up-to-date information and guidelines on managing diabetes during



Ramadan, as well as supporting Muslims who fast during Ramadan to have a safe and healthy fasting."

The sessions were be hosted by Muslim Doctors Cymru and supported by British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) and Muslim Council of Wales.

To find out more, visit: www.facebook.com/muslimdoccymru

10 Let the Immune Cell see the Virus: Scientists Discover Unique Way to Target Common Virus

Human cytomegalovirus (HCMV) is a common virus that affects one in 200 newborn babies in the UK, for which there is only limited treatment available. Researchers have discovered a new type of antibody in the lab which - instead of killing the virus directly - marks infected cells so the immune system can "see" them.

Lead author Dr Richard Stanton, a virologist, said: "HCMV is a major challenge because it has evolved a range of different techniques to avoid the body's own immune response.

"We have developed a really unique way of letting the immune system see the virus so it can get on with its task of killing it."

The study is published in the **Journal of Clinical Investigation**.

MEDIC people

ReMEDy talks to **Dr Alexander Hackney, alumnus;**
Sam Johnson, undergraduate student;
Nia Cwyfan Hughes, postgraduate student and
Dr Wioleta Zelek, member of staff,
 to ask the questions we love to know the answers to!

1. As a child what did you want to be when you grew up?

AH As far as I can remember I was interested in most things as a kid, although biology and the general sciences were at the forefront of what I enjoyed from an early age. I'd say that the decision between if I sought a career involving dinosaurs or humans however developed during my teens – the idea of learning about anatomy and physiology that was happening inside me, quite literally at the same time as I was learning about it, fascinated me.

Dr Alexander Hackney (BSc 2015, MBBCh 2019)



I am currently finishing my FY2 Year in a busy inner-city Birmingham Trust, aspiring towards a career in General Medicine with an interest in Gastroenterology. I studied at Cardiff University from 2012-2019, completing a Biomedical Sciences BSc before continuing onto the Cardiff MBBCh course via the graduate entry route. My time in the School of Medicine developed an enjoyment for Medical Education, and I am looking forward to working as a Clinical Teaching and Simulation Fellow for University of Birmingham and Aston University students during the upcoming year. Outside of medicine, I have recently taken up bouldering as a new physical (and mental!) challenge.

SJ When I was a child I always thought about medicine, I always thought it would combine my love for science and my interest in problem solving. So I always saw myself being in medicine like a human-repairing mechanic!

NCH I have always had a fascination with the medical field, so I knew that from an early age that I wanted to be involved in some way with medical research or medicine.

WZ I have always been attracted to science and art, everyone in my close circle was convinced that I will become a famous artist having won a number of local awards and established a large art portfolio, but the minute I walked into the research lab, the joy and endless possibilities

I've discovered, I was sold on science. I was encouraged by my teachers to take on the University Chemistry course, this decision came as a surprise to my family (and to me!) as I was first generation in my family to go to the University.

2. Who is your personal or professional hero?

AH Looking back, my heroes are those who went above and beyond to encourage me to where I've been fortunate enough to get to today. Both Dr Athanasios 'Thanasi' Hassoulas (my first CBL facilitator) and Miss Rachel Hargest (Consultant Colorectal Surgeon at UHW) of the School of Medicine have continued to express a genuine passion for their respective fields which I hope to one day emulate in my own way. They supported me (and continue to do so to this day!) through my pre-clinical and clinical medical studies respectively, inspiring me to hopefully provide a similar degree of mentorship in my new clinical teaching role!

SJ Difficult question! There are many people who I have idolized in my life/journey, but some of the oldest inspirations I have are my parents. Always looked up to them.

NCH My professional hero is Rosalind Franklin due to her pioneering work in molecular chemistry.

WZ There are two people that were and are important in both my personal and professional growth. One is my high school teacher Jadwiga Swiech that planted the idea in my mind to study science and apply for MSc studies; the second is Professor Paul Morgan, my supervisor and mentor, who has fully supported my development as a scientist and move into independence. His career and contribution to the field are truly inspiring and I hope that one day I will be able to match them.

3. What first brought you to our School of Medicine?

AH Regarding undertaking both of my degrees in Cardiff, I have always considered it to be Wales that chose me as opposed to it being the other way around! In 2015 I was graciously fated to continue my studies in Wales, finding out that my final medical school choices fell between the Cardiff School of Medicine and (the equally fanatastic) Swansea University Medical School (a decision between Cardiff and Swansea being one to never be made lightly... both on and off of the sporting pitch!). Cardiff quickly became a second home for me during my Biomedical studies, and applying to stay on for my medical studies was a no-brainer, especially having being taught by a number of the amazing staff in the anatomy centre and beyond previously.

SJ I was born in Cardiff and lived here my whole life, made sense to stay here a little longer!

NCH During my undergraduate degree I had the opportunity to do a year in industry, which I was lucky enough to do in the Infection and Immunity division at Cardiff School of Medicine. I loved the experience and it solidified my decision in pursuing a career in medical research.

WZ I was attracted by the opportunity to increase my expertise and to learn new things. I had a stable, permanent job as a Senior Scientist in a

Sam Johnson (BSc 2018, Medicine 2019)



I am currently a 3rd year post-graduate medical student who is studying in Cardiff University on the new C21 medical programme in North Wales (which is based out of Bangor University). I am also the current acting Secretary of Bangor Medsoc. I did a BSc in Medical Pharmacology previously and I am working on an MPhil (part-time) based on wound healing. Outside of my studies I have always enjoyed being in music ensembles, keeping fit, and travelling to and exploring new places.

local biotech company, my work was interesting, but I felt like I needed more of a challenge. I found a technician job advert at the School of Medicine that was on assay development and generation of antibodies, something that I wanted to learn, so even though the salary was much lower than my biotech job, I applied. Also, I was hoping that this would lead to the chance to work towards a PhD, something I always wanted to do.

4. What is/was your favourite thing about living and working in Wales?

AH I've always felt that the brilliant part about living in Cardiff is the big-city vibe it provides in a relatively small geographical area, everything you could want being on your door. Moreover, I've been fortunate to travel and live in most parts of Wales as part of my medical school placements. Returning to the sunny beaches of Aberdovey and Tywyn where I had my final year GP placement is always a nostalgic treat, the walks and friendly atmosphere being a welcome escape from the usual city lifestyle.

SJ That after 20 years of living here I finally learnt enough road names to be able to understand directions around Cardiff.

NCH As a Welsh speaking individual who grew up in Wales, I love the language, the country and the culture.

WZ I came to Wales in 2006 with hope to find a lab based post. At first I spent a few months working as a waitress, learning English in the evenings. My first "proper" job was in the NHS labs, then I moved to Pharma and later to Academia. On this journey I've met many people, most of them genuinely kind and helpful. I've settled well in Cardiff, it is a great city with everything being located pretty close. There are lots of beautiful places to visit in Wales, including the coastal paths and beaches; collectively all these make Wales great place to live. Indeed, my enthusiasm for Wales persuaded two of my sisters to follow my path to Cardiff!

5. What does a day in your life look like?

AH Although the pandemic has unfortunately minimised the options of how to spend my time out of work over the last year, my working commitments have greatly varied over the last couple of years due to the regular movement between rotations that the Foundation Programme imparts. At the time of writing I have just finished a very busy four months on the Acute Medical Unit at Sandwell General Hospital. A regular day could vary from starting a ward round at 8am sharp with the consultant, to long day shifts helping lead the medical 'take' with the registrar, receiving and triaging all the patient referrals for those requiring inpatient care from the Emergency Department team. Regardless of my daily role, my duties always

involved managing often unwell patients during the second COVID-19 wave, coming to a more definitive diagnosis through playing detective at the 'front door' of the hospital, gaining experience in medical procedures and investigations.

SJ I currently study medicine in north Wales as part of a new graduate entry scheme in Cardiff University medical school called C21north. And as part of this course we take a CARER year where we work in a GP practice for the whole year. So typically wake up 5am - 5.30am to exercise then get on with my day, be it going to GP practice or studying from home (thanks COVID), then eat dinner, then fall asleep.

NCH Due to the flexibility provided by a PhD and this field, no two days tend to be the same. However, a working day in my life will tend to either be in the tissue culture labs working with the recombinant viruses or reading the literature to gain either an insight into the results I could expect to see from my ongoing experiments or to gain ideas for future experiments. Once my working day is done, I will relax by either taking a walk through Roath park and catching up with my friends online.

WZ I love working in the lab, planning and doing experiments and I feel very fortunate that I was able to continue working throughout the pandemic. I had to re-focus my work to address the relevant issues, nevertheless it was important for me to stay research active and keep my working routine. Most of the day I spend in the lab on the campus, and in the evenings I go through literature and catch up with writing, or return to my first passion, art, for a few hours.

6. How do you relax?

AH Downtime and wellbeing has become more important than ever during the current climate in the medical world. I have a self-professed love of all things Japanese, having spent a number of months living and working in Japan previously. During my evening I've recently put my culinary skills to the test trying to recreate my favourite Japanese dishes (to mixed results!), alongside catching up on some manga series that had been on my backlog.

SJ Usually hesitantly as I have likely forgotten to do something.

Nia Cwyfan Hughes (BSc 2018, PhD 2020-)



I am a first year PhD student working in the Division of Infection and Immunity examining the modulation of immune response to HCMV infection. I previously studied my undergraduate degree in Biochemistry at Cardiff University and completed my MSc in Immunology at Kings College London. During my undergraduate degree I had the opportunity to do a year in industry, which I undertook at Cardiff University's Division of Infection and Immunity. This placement year was where I discovered my passion for medical research and immunology.

NCH The main way I relax is by playing netball, which I have done consistently since I was 9 years old for various teams, or by reading an Agatha Christie novel.

WZ My favourite way to relax is painting. I like creating colourful art pieces using oil or acrylic paints, occasionally I have exhibited them in a local cafe.

7. What is your secret ambition? (just between us)

AH I endeavour to one day wake up feeling more rested than I did the night before – if anyone has

found the secret to a regular and consistent sleep schedule as a doctor I am all ears!

SJ To learn how to moonwalk. Never know when it'll come in handy.

NCH My secret ambition is to be the first Welsh woman to win a Nobel prize for medicine.

WZ My work is focused on development of novel therapies. My (not so secret) ambition is to develop an impactful, effective drug that will help people and improve their quality of life.

8. What is the funniest thing that has happened to you recently?

AH One of my patients during my recent GP rotation informed me that they thought they had attended the wrong specialist appointment for their hearing problems instead of their hip pain, after the reception team had booked them in for a consultation with Dr 'Hack-Knee'. Perhaps I've missed a beat and should be looking into a career in Trauma and Orthopaedic surgery!

SJ Fell over a very small curb, a small curb but a big fall such as one you'd call a 'Yard sale' on a ski slope (dropping everything I was carrying and my belongings thrown across the ground). And I thought I got away with it with no one seeing till I turned around and saw a carpark of amused people desperately looking away all in unison...

NCH The funniest thing that has happened to me recently is on the first evening after moving to my new place, I was closing the curtains and managed to pull down the curtain rail instead! I then had to fix it by gluing the curtain rail back into place and it is still currently being held up by an extendable pole.

WZ Little things make me happy these days, with so many COVID related restrictions in place. Recently I found a note behind my windscreen wiper saying "Life is hard right now but so are you! We've got this! Smile and pass the kindness on." A hopeful note from a stranger cheered me up.

9. If you could have any job in the whole wide world that you could imagine or make up, what job would that be?

AH Over the years I have flipped and flopped between a number of medical specialties to aspire towards, the UK medical system becoming increasingly sub-specialised as advancements continue. I find specialist procedures and investigations from general surgery and radiology fascinating, albeit thoroughly enjoying the more general medical aspects of gastroenterology. I thought a job that contained all of these didn't exist, until whilst on elective in Japan I saw the same surgeon take the images of the liver, remove a tumour and quickly run away to dissect the sample for histopathological staining (before the operation had even finished!) all within the same day. I best start practising my Japanese!

SJ Fuss dogs all day, the difficulty is finding someone who will pay me for it though.

NCH If I could have any job in the world, it would be a research job whereby my cells and viruses would recognise when it was a bank holiday or the weekend and adjust their division cycles accordingly.

AT For now I enjoy my work and my daily routine, I'm living the dream! In the future I'd love to be a Professor leading a small team of enthusiastic young researchers.

10. What advice would you offer School of Medicine students today?

AH A wise GP and now good friend once told me the most valuable piece of advice that I have held dear during my first few years of professional practice, that is to "enjoy every step of the way". Whilst it is important to plan ahead and gain

Wiola Zelek (PhD 2020)



I am immunologist, trained in chemistry with few years of industrial experience. I started working at Cardiff University in 2015 as a Research Technician, then progressed to undertaking a PhD with Professor Paul Morgan funded by the Welsh Government, studying the complement system as a target for developing new drugs to treat autoimmune diseases. This time was highly enjoyable and productive, generating several publications. I continued this work after my PhD thanks to support from ISSF (Wellcome Trust) and am now again supported by Welsh Government on a Health Care Research Wales (HCRW) Fellowship.

insight into your future goals, enjoy and make the most of your time as part of the School of Medicine both inside and outside of the clinical setting, as opposed to it being just another stepping stone. The treadmill never stops, so take your time and don't make it a race to the end!

SJ Don't be afraid to ask a question/ask to get involved in anything – people like to see enthusiasm. Also pass medicine. Thank me later my dudes.

NCH To ensure that they choose a career or field that they are truly passionate about as someone who is passionate about their work will always find the work easier and more fulfilling.

WZ To explore the opportunities University offers, and to get as much "hands on" experience as possible; it opens up more opportunities for future placements/jobs.

11. What does the School of Medicine need more of?

AH As discussed earlier I found great benefit (and friendship), in senior mentors involved in areas of my interest. Whilst I feel there is a good formal support network with tutors from the School, an initiative linking passionate students and specialists for those desiring such could provide invaluable ongoing opportunities. A similar programme has been introduced at my Trust to great feedback!

SJ Dogs. Especially puppies.

NCH A stronger presence of Welsh speakers so that they can promote better communication avenues for Welsh first language speakers within the medical field.

WZ I think we have great experts, world leaders in medicine, but perhaps they aren't sufficiently visible. Students and junior staff could benefit from having more interactive events and seminars from these leaders. I'm looking forward to the post-COVID era when these will be re-activated.

12. If you could turn the clock back, what would you do differently?

AH I've said it above and will echo it again "to enjoy every step of the way". Even now when I find myself getting swept up in 'the process', I make an effort to actively take stock in the present and take a positive "mental snapshot" with everyone around me – something I wish I had done more of, looking back!

SJ Make my passwords more memorable.

NCH If I could turn back the clock, I would have picked a Biochemistry undergraduate degree that had more Immunology and Virology content.

WZ I would enter Academia sooner. Although I've enjoyed my biotech jobs, working in Academia is much more fun and very rewarding.

Engaging BAME communities

in the COVID-19 vaccination programme

At the outset of the vaccination rollout programme, a group called Muslim Doctors Cymru involving Drs Bnar Talabani and Mohammad Alhadj Ali, from the School of Medicine began work to dispel some of the myths circling on the internet in the first languages of BAME communities.

“I think the problem is that whereas resources that combat this misinformation are available in English, they’re not necessarily available in languages that some of these communities speak as a first language,” explains Dr Bnar Talabani.

Muslim Doctors Cymru are carrying out a survey asking people for their views on the vaccine - over 300 people have replied so far, and the results paint a picture reflected in other polling on the issue. About 10% of people said they would not be taking the vaccine, with 16% unsure.

“These aren’t anti-vaxxers, they are actually very, very open to dialogue,” Dr Talabani said.

“One elderly gentleman I recently had a conversation with said to me ‘well, does the vaccine change my DNA?’ and I said ‘Well, no, it cannot because it doesn’t come into contact with your DNA’.

“And he said ‘okay, well that was my only concern. I’m happy to have it now’, and it was really that simple.”

Dr Talabani said a problem within communities is that people receive misinformation in their own language via social media.

“If English is not your first language, you receive lots of misinformation via WhatsApp and other social media platforms in languages that are your first language, but the accurate information that is needed to combat this you don’t necessarily have access to in that language,” she said.

Having that information accessible and readily available and actually using social media as a platform to spread it just as the misinformation is also being spread, so arming communities with accurate information in multiple languages will go a long way in helping address this.”

She added it was important this information comes from a “grassroots” level as well as from the government, and to engage faith leaders.

Muslim Doctors Cymru are working with Welsh Government and local health boards to improve access to the vaccine. For example, two mosques have been set up as vaccination centres. This has led to a positive take up of the vaccines across these local communities (not just Muslims) including amongst homeless people who didn’t know where else to go for their vaccines.

Muslim Doctors Cymru are holding weekly webinars in different languages and engaging people within different communities.

Dr Talabani concluded: “We’re having feedback that dialogue, the possibility to ask questions about the vaccine in a language they’re comfortable with, with people who are from their own community, is really helping them address those concerns.”



Dr Bnar Talabani



Muslim Doctors Cymru can be found on social media: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/muslimdoccymru> and Twitter: @muslimdoccymru where you will be able to access a range of resources in multiple languages.

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