

NCMH Insider

The latest news and research from the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH)

October 2019

Gods & Kings



Inside:

- + Finding and losing schizophrenia
- + Virtual reality treatment for PTSD
- + Learning disability and employment
- + Animating ADHD

In this issue



12 GODS & KINGS



7

VIRTUAL REALITY TREATMENT FOR PTSD

Read about a joint study between Cardiff University and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board into a potential new treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



4

FINDING AND LOSING SCHIZOPHRENIA

Find out what Professor James Walters and award-winning author Nathan Filer discussed when they sat down at Big Moose Coffee Co to talk about Nathan's latest book,

5 NEWS ROUND UP

Catch up with the latest news, including a new £10m research centre aiming to tackle anxiety and depression in young people.

8 LEARNING DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Systematic review illustrates link between improved mental and physical health and the employment status of people with learning disabilities.

9 TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

SHARE UK, the Adolescent Mental Health Data Platform and Chwarae Teg are looking for people to participate in online surveys - see if you're eligible to take part.

14 INFOGRAPHIC: PTSD

10 OUT AND ABOUT

See the range of events and exhibitions we've been part of over the last few months.

15 MEET THE TEAM: GRACE

Meet Grace, a member of our team of psychology assistants responsible for interviewing research participants.

NCMH Insider, October 2019

Editorial team

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Welcome to NCMH Insider

It's been six months since the last issue NCMH Insider, so it's been a challenge whittling down the stories to share with you! We skipped our July issue as we published our annual report, which you can download on our website.

In this issue you can read an overview of a fantastic event we hosted, where Prof James Walters and author Nathan Filer discuss schizophrenia and psychosis (p.4). We were delighted Nathan could join us, and it also gave us the opportunity to record our first live podcast, so if you missed the event, I'd recommend having a listen.

There's also an overview of the results of a randomised control trial led by Prof Jon Bisson and his team, which finds that virtual reality technology could be used to help military veterans suffering from PTSD (p.7).

Keeping our focus on research, we highlight some recent work involving Dr Stephen Beyer looking at the relationship between paid employment and physical and mental health in people with learning disabilities (p.9).

We also introduce Gods & Kings (p.12), an auto-

biographical play written by Paul Whittaker, drawing on his experience of bipolar disorder. The play has been touring Wales and we're delighted to have supported it.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, and as ever, thank you to all those who have helped with our research. There are over 19,000 of you now and I can't overstate how grateful we are for your support.

Keep in touch

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Os hoffech dderbyn Llais yr NMCH yn
Gymraeg, cysylltwch â ni ar unrhyw un o'r
uchod.

Finding and losing schizophrenia

In September we hosted a fascinating discussion between award-winning author Nathan Filer and our deputy director Professor James Walters

Schizophrenia is a contentious diagnosis and source of often heated debate across the various professions and stakeholders associated with mental health.

Some argue that it has outlasted its usefulness as a single diagnosis and should instead be viewed as the extreme end of a 'psychosis spectrum disorder'.

To unpick the issues, we hosted a live discussion at Bigmoose Coffee Co. in Cardiff. Professor James Walters, deputy director at NCMH interviewed Nathan Filer, an author and former mental health nurse, about his book *The Heartland: Finding and Losing Schizophrenia*.

At its heart, the book focuses on personal stories from individuals and their families living with a schizophrenia diagnosis.

Alongside these stories, Nathan writes a series of essays exploring what these experiences can teach us.

The conversation started with Nathan and James discussing the difficulties of language when talking about mental illness, including the term mental illness. James and Nathan go on to discuss 'so-called schizophrenia', the problems around diagnosis, mental health services, medication and research, before taking questions from the audience.



You can follow the discussion by listening to the latest episode of the Piece of Mind Podcast. Head to ncmh.info/podcast to listen, and don't forget to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Animating ADHD

We have supported a project led by Cardiff University's MRC Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics to provide an accessible resource for children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The project, funded by the Wellcome Trust, has been a collaboration with ADHD Cardiff to bring together children and families to develop an animation about what it means to have ADHD.

It combines the research findings of the MRC Centre's developmental psychiatry team with ideas and opinions from people with lived experience of ADHD.

Working together, researchers, children and families co-produced story boards during a series of workshops. Once complete, the team asked professionals from clinical services for their opinions to ensure the animation provided information in an accurate and accessible way.

The animation was launched on 28 October, where the families affected by ADHD joined our researchers and a group of professionals working in this area for special screening event.

Dr Sharifah Agha, who led the project, said: "We're so pleased with this animation and I'd like to thank all the children, young people and their families who worked with us to produce it.

"We hope the animation will be a valuable resource to support children diagnosed with ADHD."

You can watch the animation at ncmh.info/adhd.

Project SEARCH graduation

We recently joined our colleagues at Cardiff University to celebrate the graduation on the latest cohort of Project SEARCH interns.

Project SEARCH is a one-year internship programme supporting young people with a learning disability and/or autism to gain the skills and experience to move into paid employment.

We feel privileged to have contributed to this project, with three of the interns, Alex, Samantha and Andrew, having spent time with different teams at NCMH.

Well done Alex, Samantha and Andrew, and good luck with your future careers!

NCMH annual report

We have published our annual report for 2018-19. It gives a good overview of our activities across a range of areas and sets out our future direction, should we be successful in our funding application to Health and Care Research Wales.

Download the report from our website: ncmh.info/about

Tackling youth anxiety and depression

A pioneering research centre focused on understanding and developing new ways of reducing anxiety and depression in young people will be established at Cardiff University with funding of £10m from the Wolfson Foundation.

The Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health, based at Cardiff University working with Swansea University, will be a dedicated interdisciplinary research centre where Cardiff and Swansea University experts will work in partnership with, Welsh Government, NHS Wales, University Health Boards and schools across Wales.

Managing sleep problems

We have produced a new information leaflet on sleep problems and how to manage them.

It covers a range of problems including insomnia and sleep apnoea. Download it from our website: ncmh.info/leaflets



Virtual reality treatment could help military veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder

Virtual reality technology could be used to help military veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a new study concludes.

Researchers and clinicians at Cardiff University and within NHS Wales have completed a randomised controlled trial of the new therapy, known as 3MDR (multi-modular motion-assisted memory desensitisation and reconsolidation), among 42 military veterans. All those who took part in the study had not recovered with conventional forms of treatment.

The novel new therapy involves participants walking on a large treadmill while interacting with a series of images they have chosen to represent their traumatic experiences, which are displayed on a large screen. Each session is guided by a therapist and aims to eliminate cognitive avoidance – a coping strategy that can contribute to the worsening of PTSD symptoms.

During the study, veterans who received this treatment reported a 19% greater reduction in PTSD symptoms after 12 weeks, compared to veterans who had not yet been exposed to 3MDR.

PTSD is a common and debilitating condition that is estimated to affect around 6% of British military veterans. Symptoms include being constantly on edge and vividly re-experiencing a traumatic event, and often result in social isolation.

Dr Neil Kitchiner, Director of Veterans' NHS Wales (VNHSW), based at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and lead research therapist for the study explained:

"To be able to offer our past patients who haven't responded to current treatments the opportunity to try 3MDR and possibly reduce their traumatic stress symptoms has been very exciting. Six of our therapists have risen to the challenge to become trained in 3MDR and provided weekly therapy to the 42 participants during the trial."

3MDR is based on a combination of virtual reality exposure as well as eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing, which is an established psychological treatment for PTSD.

All participants were military veterans living in South Wales who continued to experience service-related PTSD following treatment with trauma-focused psychological therapy.

They completed a baseline assessment and were then randomised to receive 3MDR immediately or after a delay of 14 weeks, with follow-up assessments occurring at 12 and 26 weeks.

The group that received immediate treatment showed significantly improved PTSD symptoms than the delayed treatment group at the 12-week follow up.

The delayed treatment group also responded well to 3MDR and the immediate treatment group maintained their improvement when they were followed up at 26 weeks.

Professor Jon Bisson, who led the study at Cardiff University's Division of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences, said: "Military veterans are at heightened risk of developing PTSD and, unfortunately, are often not significantly helped by existing treatments. The positive results of our study mean that 3MDR has emerging evidence as an effective intervention to help military veterans with treatment-resistant PTSD.

"However, it is important to note that not all participants responded well to 3MDR and further research is now needed to determine who this therapy is likely to help most and whether it is also effective for people with PTSD unrelated to military service."

Dr Kitchiner added: "I look forward to sharing our findings and hope we can build on this study to broaden the therapies available to all individuals with PTSD."

The results of the trial, which has been funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) and supported by Health and Care Research Wales, were presented to the participants, their families and other stakeholders on Tuesday 1 October at an event in Cardiff.

You can download the executive summary through our blog: ncmh.info/blog

Once the full report is complete, it will be published on the Forces in Mind Trust's website: fim-trust.org/reports

Learning disability and employment

Systematic review illustrates link between improved mental and physical health and the employment status of people with learning disabilities.

Researchers from NCMH and Lancaster University's Centre for Disability Research analysed 12 studies published between 1990-2018 looking at the relationship between employment status and the health of people with learning disabilities.

There is already strong evidence to suggest that paid employment is generally good for the physical and mental health in the general population, but no review had specifically addressed whether this relationship was the same in people with learning disabilities.

Although relatively few studies in this area were identified, the evidence presented in this review suggests that better physical and mental health outcomes from employment are relevant for people with intellectual disabilities

However, the researchers were unable to pinpoint whether better mental and physical health status was a direct result of being in paid employment.

Dr Stephen Beyer, learning disabilities research lead at NCMH explains, "the majority of the studies in this review are cross-sectional, so it isn't possible for us to attribute causality.

"Even in the best quality longitudinal study we reviewed, we can't confirm the direction of the relationship between change in behaviour and employment status."

The association between health and employment appears to be accounted for by

two distinct processes.

The first is health selection, where healthier people are more likely to gain and remain in employment. There are likely discriminatory biases at play here, resulting from the barriers people with learning disabilities face in participating in employment.

Secondly, specific health benefits associated with employment. These can include for example, having a less sedentary lifestyle as a result of being in work.

Dr Beyer added, "there's more work to be done to determine specific health benefits attributable to employment for people with learning disabilities. This would help support the argument that health outcomes should become a driver for pursuing employment for this population, as well as financial cost-benefit issues and an equality agenda.

"It would also help to demonstrate that while employment programmes can be expensive, the costs may be offset by reduced costs in relation to healthcare, mental health and other services."

The paper, *The association between employment and the health of people with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review*, is published in *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*.

The study was funded by Public Health England. The authors were Dr Janet Robinson, Dr Steve Beyer, Prof Eric Emmerson, Dr Susannah Baines and Prof Chris Hatton

Take part in research

Disability and employment

Do you identify as a disabled person or have a long-term health condition?

Chwarae Teg is carrying out research into disability and employment, and you can help by sharing your experiences in their online survey.

They will explore the barriers that disabled women and men experience to help decision-makers and employers make positive changes for disabled people in employment.

They want to hear from disabled women and men so we can understand how experiences can differ.

The survey will take 10 to 15 minutes of your time, and they would like to hear from as many people as possible.

To take part in the survey, visit:
surveymonkey.co.uk/r/3KF8HC6

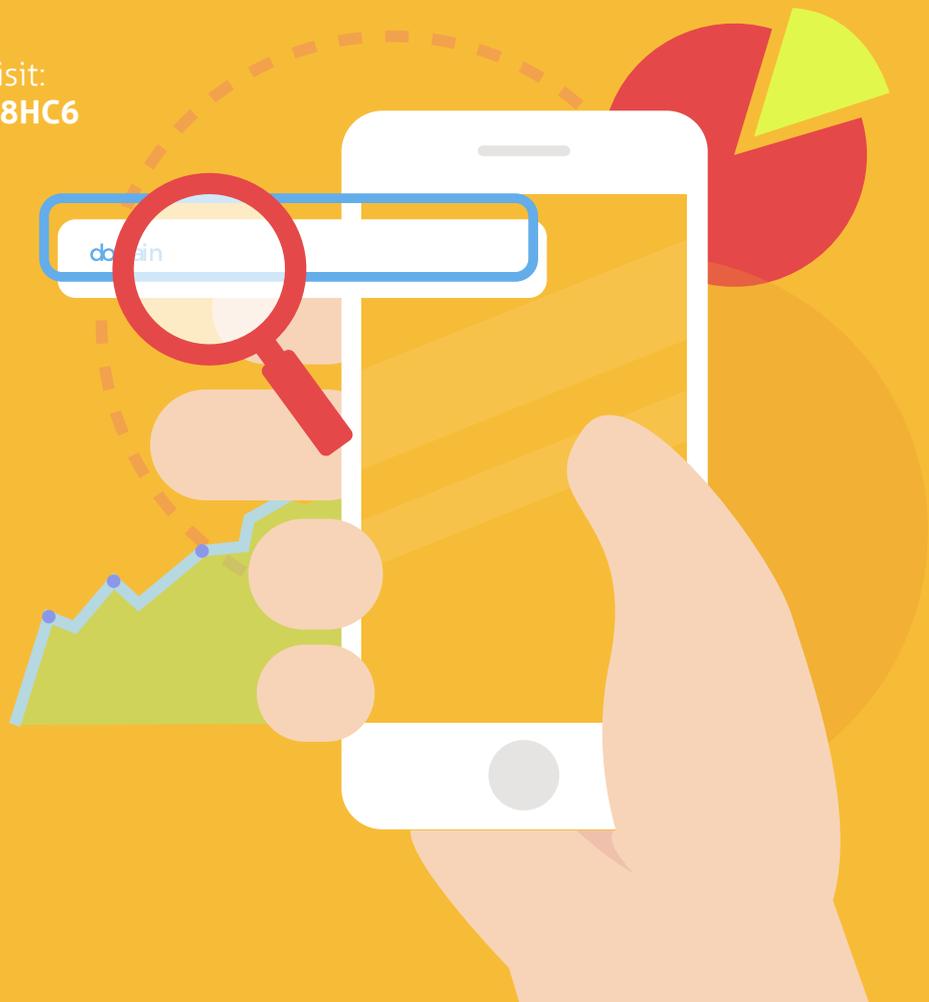
Your data and mental health

SHARE UK and the Adolescent Mental Health Data Platform (ADP) at Swansea University are calling for young people aged 16-24 to give their views on personal data and mental health research.

The Big Data and Mental Health Research survey aims to learn more about how mental health research could best address the issues that are important to young people.

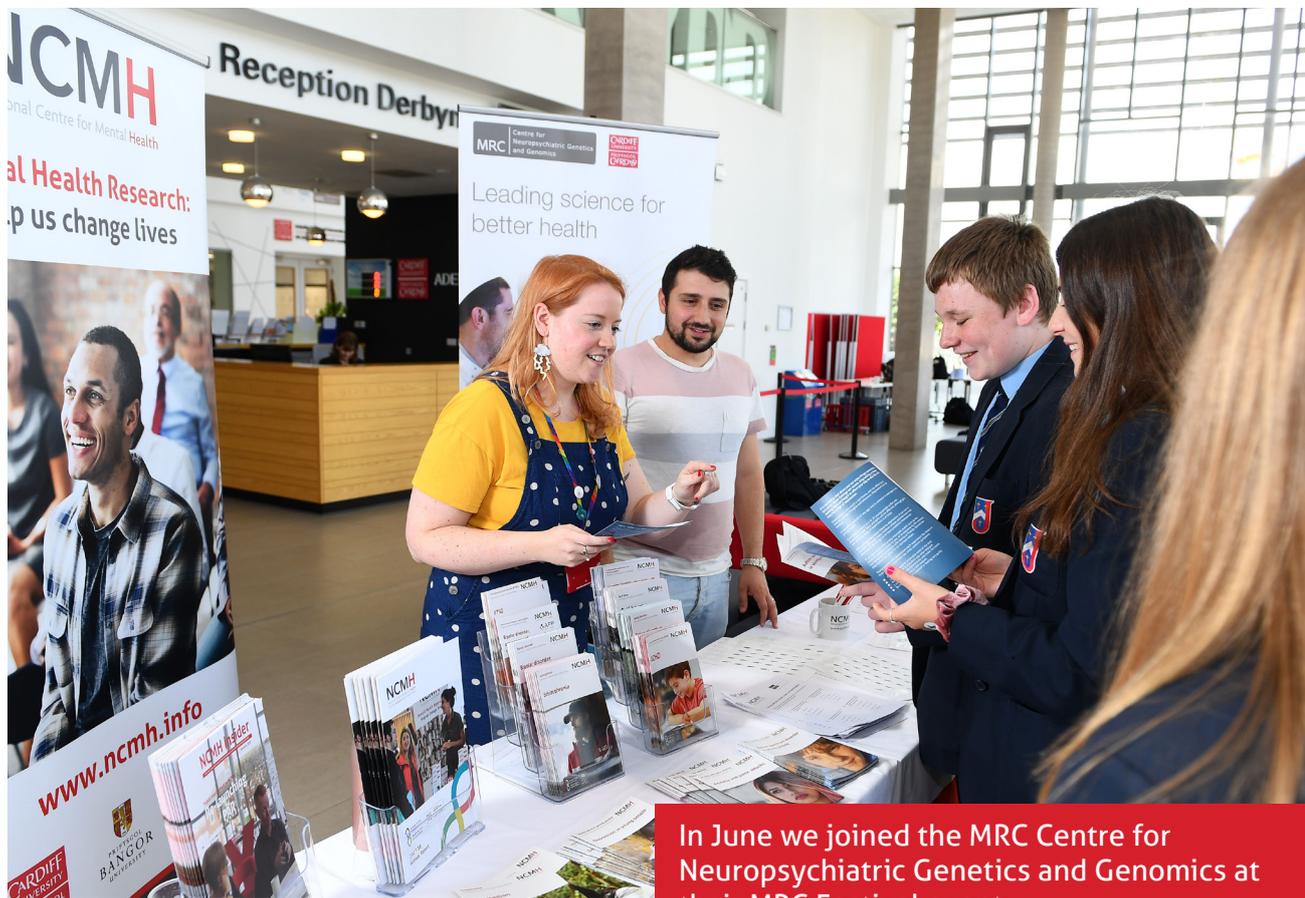
They are particularly interested hearing views on how your data should be looked after and used for research. This includes things such as health care and social media data.

The results of the survey will inform research going forward at both SHARE UK and ADP. To take part in the survey, visit:
surveymonkey.co.uk/r/2s3ymx5

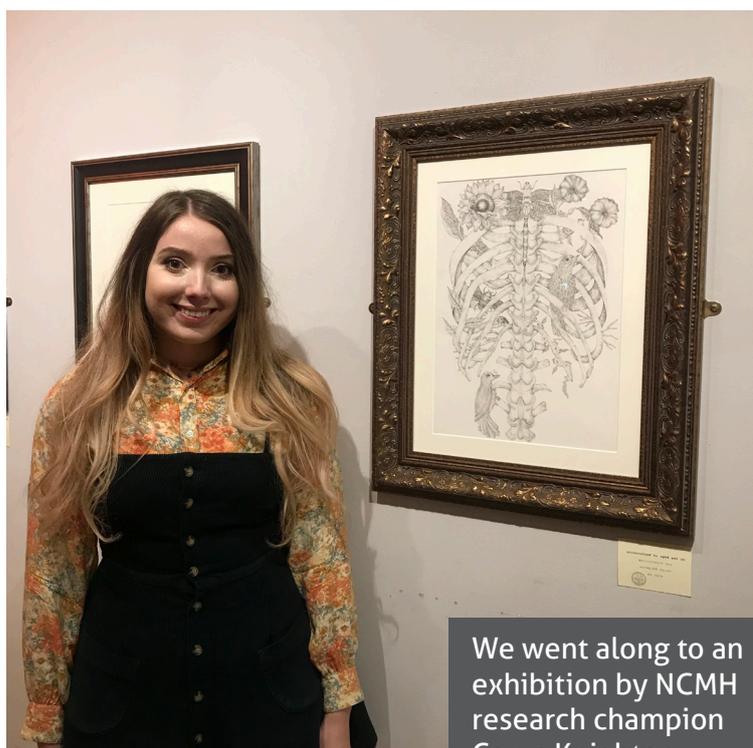


Out and about

We have had a busy few months getting out and about and speaking to people about mental health and taking part in our research.



In June we joined the MRC Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics at their MRC Festival event.



We went along to an exhibition by NCMH research champion Cerys Knighton.



We recently exhibited at the Health and Research Wales conference, testing our game to highlight the value of collaboration.



We joined Health and Care Research Wales for Let's Talk Research, a family event that took place in July in Bangor and Cardiff.



Back in May we sponsored a Go Tri event, with some our team having a go themselves

and Care
out a new card
oration.



Danielle and Grace met Binki from Cariad Pet Therapy on World Mental Health Day in Swansea.

Gods & Kings

“Ever since I can remember I have always been different...
If I take the pill that they have placed in my hand, who will I
become?”

We were delighted to support the nationwide tour of *Gods & Kings*, an autobiographical play written and co-directed by Paul Whittaker.

It draws on Paul's real-life experience to produce an emotionally honest, and darkly funny, account of what it is to live a life ruled by mental illness - in this case, bipolar disorder.

“It's about the period when I was 23, studying at what was then, Newport Film School, and I got diagnosed with bipolar manic depression” said Paul Whittaker.

“The play essentially deals with him getting his diagnosis and then being given the decision, whether to take medication or not. It's about him looking back at his life and looking at what this kind of diagnosis means.”

The show is co-directed by Tamsin Griffiths, a cross-disciplinary artist with her own experiences of

mental health problems. She explains, “It is a show about identity. Paul wrote a piece about the Self as part of his M.A. He shared that piece of writing with me, and I was like, ‘Yes, this is something special here, you know.’

“The reason why we are doing this project and will continue to work with this project and give it longevity and life is because we feel like it's a story that a lot of people connect to. It allows people to connect with the character in different ways.

“Even if they don't understand anything about bipolar, they can empathise or gain an insight into the world of mental illness, and then that opens up a whole breadth of conversation.”

The play originally opened to critical acclaim at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff in 2017. It was also recognised as best practice by Arts Council of Wales in its *Arts and Health in Wales* report.

Following this success, Arts Council of Wales and Public Health Wales provided funding and support for *Gods & Kings* to tour Wales and reach a wider audience to open up conversations around mental health.





In preparation for the tour, Paul and Tamsin conducted cross-sector audience development work, engaging with a broad range of people and groups including service users, health professionals and community groups.

The main development is the addition of a new character. Sami Thorpe, British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter and performer joins Robert Bowman, who plays Paul.

Sami also plays the role of Paul, interpreting the dialogue using BSL.

Tamsin said "It was really important for us to ensure that it remained authentic and we didn't theatricalise it to a point where it lost the true core of what it was about.

"We worked really hard with the actors and the team just

to make sure that it remained honest, and a story that people can really, truly connect to."

The tour kicked off at the Riverfront in Newport, and, following performances from Aberystwyth and Llanelli to Blackwood and Brecon, the team returned to Cardiff, this time at the Wales Millennium Centre.

To support the tour, we provided some funding to allow service users to receive discounted tickets at each venue.

We have also shared some resources from our Bipolar Education Programme Cymru (BEPC) for the resources section of the print edition of the play, published by Oberon Books.

Commenting on our support, Paul said, "NCMH have been an incredible ally of Gods & Kings since it's opening run in 2017.

"We're the kind of people that if we were isolated at a point in our mental health journey, we would be attracted to come and see a piece of work about someone talking about their mental health.

"By giving us the ability to offer discounted tickets to service users who might be on a fixed income is incredibly important to us, so we're incredibly grateful to NCMH for supporting us in this way."

The book was published to mark the start of the tour and is available for purchase at: www.oberonbooks.com



Actors Robert and Sami with co-directors Paul Whitaker and Tamsin Griffiths.

PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



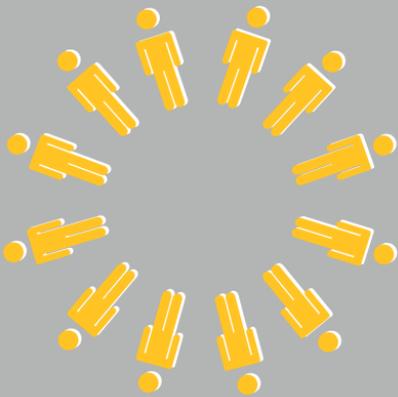
PTSD is the name given to a set of symptoms triggered by traumatic events in a person's life such as real or threatened death, severe injury or sexual assault.

7%

of us will experience PTSD at some point in our lives.

2x

Women are **twice** as likely as men to develop PTSD.



2 million people in the UK are affected by PTSD



Anyone can develop PTSD and it is not limited to people who serve in the military.

0.3%

of UK mental health research expenditure goes towards PTSD.



Meet the team: Grace

I'm Grace Woolway and I have been working at NCMH since July 2018.

I am a psychology assistant in the field team at NCMH and my role is split between recruiting individuals with psychosis and schizophrenia and learning disabilities.

This job has been invaluable for me, allowing me to gain experience which will help me to pursue a career clinical psychology.

My background is in psychology, specifically in autism and learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury and mental health.

Since a young age I have been fascinated by mental health and the workings of the brain, so working in a research capacity has been exciting to explore the intricacies of different disorders.

My role involves recruiting participants into NCMH research. I often get in touch with third sector organisations and charities to speak to them about our research and what taking part involves.

When people decide to take part in the research I either go and see them at home or a clinic to complete the assessment.

Even though I have been doing this job for over a year now, I never hear the same story twice. Meeting our participants and hearing about their experience is without a doubt my favourite part of this job.

Recruitment has now spanned across to England, so myself and other team members travel to complete research assessments at our remote sites all over the UK.

Recently, I have also started to train our NHS staff to complete our learning disability assessment in England. This allows us to create a cohort of people that is representative of the UK population.

I am also lucky enough to be involved with the Engage to Change team at NCMH. The Engage to Change team works across Wales to get young people aged 16-25 with a learning disability and/or autism into paid work placements.

I have enjoyed every minute of this role and I have continued to learn something new on a weekly basis.

It has sparked a new interest in schizophrenia and psychosis for me, which I had very little experience of before this job.

About NCMH

The National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) brings together world-leading researchers from Cardiff, Swansea and Bangor Universities to learn more about the triggers and causes of mental health problems.

We aim to help improve diagnosis, treatment and support for the millions of people affected by mental ill-health every year, as well as tackle the stigma faced by many.

To find out more, or to help with our research, visit ncmh.info or phone us on 029 2068 8401.



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



The National Centre for Mental Health is funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales.

NCMH Insider is also available in Welsh. To request a copy please contact info@ncmh.info

