

NHS Lothian Researcher Profile

Zoe Johnstone, Clinical Specialist Respiratory Physiotherapist, Royal Hospital for Children and Young People



What type of doctoral student are you?

I am undertaking the Clinical Doctorate Programme at the University of Stirling, which I started in August 2021 and will qualify as a Doctor of Professional Health Studies. I was successful in being awarded a joint studentship from NHS Lothian and University of Stirling and my service supports me with 10 hours per week study leave. I qualified from Queen Margaret University in 2003 with an MSc in Physiotherapy having previously obtained a BSc in Applied Sports Science in Wales. My career started in adult

physiotherapy, specialising in respiratory care, in 2009 I moved to children's services where I set up a rapid response community respiratory physiotherapy service, and now work across both community and acute services. I am also an independent Non Medical Prescriber.

What is the focus of your research?

Based on experience in my role, I'm interested in the transition to adult services in young people with neurodisabilities and respiratory comorbidities. I want to undertake research that will inform service improvements and in particular I'm keen to explore if paediatric services should "step down" or adult services should "step up" in the respiratory management of these young people

Why is this research study important?

Young people with neurodisabilities can sometimes be a neglected patient group, my research focus is on transition, particularly in relation to their respiratory needs. We know from other research on transition that often parents and care givers have to give up work to transition their child into adult services. We also know that poor transition processes often result in poor health outcomes for this patient group.

What kind of research study do you plan to do?

I'm still in the early stages of my doctoral studies but I planning to do a mixed methods study to identify numbers of young people requiring specialist respiratory care and understand when transition is discussed and how it takes place. I plan to interview parents of young people with neurodisabilities and respiratory co-morbidities and other care givers and primary care providers, including GPs.

Why did you want to do doctoral studies?

The main reason was the frustration I've felt on behalf of parents and care givers. I've witnessed multiple occasions where the parents have had to stop work or take a career break to become their child's transition coordinator. Adult services do not exist for the respiratory care of this patient group and so they fall to the GP, who has rarely met them. I've observed the fear of families who desperately try and delay transition because of

this and feel something needs to be done to help this group. It was at this time that I listened to a webinar presenting some work on the principles of transition, the take home message for me was that this problem isn't going away and we need to act now and do something. Coincidentally I received an email that day about the clinical doctorate course and so decided it was time to try and do something myself.

What are you enjoying the most about being a doctoral student?

I'm now on the Scottish Respiratory Transition Group and part of the NHS Lothian Transition Forum Steering Group, neither of which I feel I would have been part of if it wasn't for this clinical doctorate. Although not directly related to my research question, I have been working as part of a team looking at inequities of care in children with chronic suppurative lung disease, of which children with neurodisabilities, who are my particular area of interest.

How have you been supported to do this work?

I've been generously supported by my line manager and the rest of my team to have allocated study time each week. I've also been given additional study leave to attend taught study days at University of Stirling

I benefit from being part of the whole 2021 Clinical Doctorate Group, which is great for peer support. I'm also a member of the local NHS Lothian Clinical Doctorate Group which meets regularly in person and via Teams to discuss current assignments, feedback on progress and assist in developing ideas.

What do you hope to do in the future? How will having a doctorate help you achieve this?

Over the next 10 years, I aspire to become Service Lead for Respiratory Physiotherapy across both community and acute Paediatric Respiratory

Physiotherapy services which will also span transition into adult services. The hope is that the doctorate studies will inform how service provision needs to adapt and change to meet the needs of families and young people whilst addressing the role of primary care services in this patient group.

I hope to establish a clinical service for children with respiratory needs and underlying neurological conditions.

I aim to improve transitional services for this group of children, establishing robust pathways, joint decision-making, clinics, and steps for transition involving the MDT, patients, parents, and carers to ensure all parties are aligned, informed and in agreement. The ultimate aim is to achieve alignment between paediatric and adult management of people with respiratory needs and underlying neurological conditions.

Have you been able to share any of your work so far?

Although not directly applicable to transition, I have presented work on young people with neurodisabilities and respiratory comorbidities:

"Shielding but not forgotten" a summary of service provision in respiratory care in special schools during Covid-19. Presented the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care (ACPRC) Conference 2021.

I have been successful in submission of two abstracts, both of which were presented at the Scottish Paediatric Society meeting in Stirling in June 2022 and the King's John Price Paediatric Respiratory Conference in June 2022.

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