

# Alison Neilson, Prescribing Support Pharmacist, Brunton Place Surgery

## First Steps into Research Gateway Award



### Tell us a bit about yourself and your career to date

I qualified as a pharmacist in 2013 and I have been working as a primary care pharmacist, in NHS Lothian for the past 4 years. I qualified as an independent prescriber in 2018 with a specialist interest in diabetes and cardiovascular risk. I have recently completed an MSc in Clinical Pharmacy Practice where I undertook a qualitative research study on referral pathways between Community Pharmacy and GP practice.

### What is the focus of your Gateway Award?

I am going to be working alongside Bruce Guthrie, Professor of General Practice, at the Advanced Care Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh, and his research team, to gain an insight into research being undertaken on multimorbidity and polypharmacy.

Bruce and his team, are carrying out research entitled 'Multimorbidity and clinical guidelines: using epidemiology to quantify the applicability of trial evidence to inform guideline development'. They are now seeking to further examine the core dataset created for the study.

I hope to use the opportunity of the Gateway Award to develop skills in quantitative research and health data analysis by completing the Health Data Science course through University of Edinburgh.

I'll be involved in this work from March to end August 2023.

### What motivated you to apply for this Gateway Award?

Working as a pharmacist in primary care I am really interested to explore research conducted into multimorbidity and polypharmacy and the challenges this creates in practice. Placed in GP practice, with an aging population and increase in people living with multiple comorbidities, I am aware of the importance of managing patients holistically. Currently many guidelines focus on a single disease state, which can lead to

interactions between comorbidities, and with associated medication, I am therefore excited by Prof Bruce Guthrie's research work in his clinical areas, enhancing patient safety and holistic care. I was also motivated by the opportunity to develop skills in data analysis and quantitative research which is a current gap in my skill set.

The Gateway Awards is the ideal steppingstone to explore research further in a supportive environment with the potential to demonstrate enhanced research skills and a better opportunity if I were to then go on to apply for a multimorbidity PhD programme.

**What are you hoping to get out of the award you have received?**

- To better understand the use of health data analysis and research methodologies in clinical research.
- To gain a greater insight into current streams of polypharmacy and multimorbidity research through the University of Edinburgh and how I can use my skills and knowledge as a pharmacist to become more involved in research in this area.
- To work alongside an experienced research team, better understand the roles of the research team and network with those involved in clinical research locally.
- To develop skills in data analysis, such as R programming and its application to clinical health data.

**What difference do you think having this funded support will make to your understanding of research?**

The opportunity of the Gateway Award allows me to gain an insight into clinical research in practice, in a supportive environment and to link in with a well-established research team. It will provide me with protected time to focus on developing research skills and integration within a local

research team. I intent to use the transferable skills gained from this opportunity in my workplace, to support the development of research skills within GP pharmacy practice. It will offer a valuable opportunity to explore clinical research, before potentially embarking on PhD studies. The Gateway Awards will also provide a valuable platform for peer support and shared learning with the cohort of other healthcare professionals also working through the Gateway Awards.

**What do you hope to do in the future and how do you thinking this Gateway Award will help you achieve this?**

I hope that in the future I will be able to carry forward my research skills, by taking part in local clinical research projects and to make use of learned data analysis skills and contacts I made during the 'Gateway Award'. Short term, the Gateway Award will provide me with desirable skills to support in the application for a multimorbidity PhD programme, demonstrating the involvement in research and quantitative skills which I currently lack. Long term, I hope to continue to develop my research skills and have a mix of a clinical and research role, I think this Gateway Award's provide the ideal introduction into this.

**Any other thoughts?**

I am really looking forward to being part of cohort 1 of the Gateway Awards and I am grateful for the opportunity that the funding provides for me to develop skills in a clinical research setting. I am also looking forward to seeing how the Gateway Awards develop and progress!

**For more information please contact:**  
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