

Health Equity Trailblazer Fellowship 2022-23

Dr Catherine James

When I was successful at interview and told my colleagues and family that I was starting the fellowship, the main question was 'so what will you actually DO'? I have to admit I didn't have much of an answer at first, and it troubled me that I wasn't sure what I was going to do for the year. As the year comes to an end, I can safely say that it has been the most rewarding, enlightening and inspiring year of my career to date.

My fellowship year can be broadly divided into two areas; firstly, work around GP training in health inequalities and furthering of previous fellows' work on Health Equity Focussed Training (HEFT), and secondly on expanding my own knowledge and experience in Inclusion Health.

The fellowship year started with the conference at which the outgoing fellows presented their work for the year. At this conference I met Nicky McAlister, one of the previous health equity fellows, who had done work evaluating and expanding GP trainee exposure to health inequalities. She had started conversations locally with GP school ADs and TPDs around the viability of introducing HEFT posts within Wessex.

Subsequently, Nicky and I delivered teaching sessions both in person and face to face with GP trainees and new to practice GP fellows on the topics of health inequality and inclusion health. We delivered 5 sessions across the course of the year which were well received and we have been invited back to deliver sessions next year. As a result of the sessions with GP trainees, I have had a number of trainees join me at the Homeless Healthcare Team to further their knowledge about inclusion health.

Throughout the year I have attended a number of conferences and I am grateful to have had CPD funding and time to be able to attend. The Dorset Health Inequalities symposium really ignited my passion to learn more and more about this area, and started my networking with colleagues working within the Inclusion Health area. Notably, I learnt about the Wessex AHSN and started to think about how I could evaluate and improve the service in which I work in order to make it better for our patients. The Pathways Faculty of Homeless and Inclusion Health conference, Doctors in Deprivation Study day and the Pathways Inclusion Health education CPD day all allowed me hugely valuable networking opportunities and as a result I have developed strong national links with others working in inclusion health.

After hearing from the AHSN, I approached my clinical manager and asked if they would support me doing some work with the AHSN to scope the service and look at how we can improve our service for our patients. As a result, we have a strategy in place to continuously evaluate our service, prioritising the voice of those with lived experience in any service changes we look to make. Through the AHSN, I have been connected with a number of people across primary care, public health and charitable organisations and we are in the process of developing a local community of practice for migrant/asylum seeker health.

Perhaps the highlight of the year was attending a 'Medicine on the Margins' conference in Dublin, organised by the formidable North Dublin GP Austin O'Carroll who has really pioneered how trainees can be trained and work in areas of deprivation. The word 'inspirational' is often overused but the whole weekend was truly inspirational, with speakers and workshops that have changed my view of medicine, politics, equality and compassion. I cannot overstate the passion that was lit within me to make inclusion health, education in health inequality and the remarkable patients we care for to be a key part of my career going forwards.

So...what next? I have had discussions with one of the Wessex TPDs and we hope to establish an ITP post for GP trainees in Homeless Health. Whilst the reach of this would be fairly small in terms of numbers, it would be a fantastic start in expanding trainee exposure to inclusion health groups. I have delivered a session to a multidisciplinary group at a local PCN around the challenges of delivering healthcare to people experiencing homelessness and plan to expand this to other local PCNs. I am in discussions with my employer to have one session a week funded to continue the strategic planning of the homeless healthcare service and a key part of that would involve education and engagement with secondary care services. I have also recently been appointed as Programme Director for Berkshire West Training Hub, an opportunity I would not have had the courage to explore had it not been for the fellowship.

I must extend huge thanks to NHSE for funding the fellowship and CPD budget, and the whole team behind the fellowship programme. In particular, Katie and Maggie have provided the most brilliant mentorship and guidance and support for which I will be forever grateful.