

Bridging research and practice: Camille Cousley's work on dementia care



Camille Cousley is a PhD researcher focused on improving mental capacity assessments for dementia patients in acute care. Her work supports more consistent hospital discharge planning and bridges research with clinical practice. Funded by University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust and ARC KSS, she aims to complete her PhD in early 2026.

Tell us about your research project

My research project is investigating ways to improve mental capacity assessments for patients with dementia in acute care settings. Mental capacity assessments play an essential part in hospital discharge for people living with dementia and their caregivers. People living with dementia can experience fluctuating capacity which can make it difficult for healthcare professionals to judge. In addition, healthcare professionals have difficulty interpreting the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and its codes of practice, leading to inconsistencies in how the act is applied in practice. Therefore, I want to develop a supportive tool that can help both healthcare professionals and the patient with dementia in the mental capacity assessment process. This could potentially lead to more reliable and accurate assessments being carried out in hospital (acute care settings).

What inspired you to undertake a PhD? How long will it take you to complete? How did you fund your studies?

I wanted a career change and this job opportunity that I received from my workplace presented as a great way for me to make a change. Also, I didn't see many people in my area of speciality go for these roles, and I thought it would be interesting to do my own research.

I am currently doing my PhD part time at the University of Chichester. I started back in 2021, and I am aiming to complete at the end of March/early April of next year. My PhD was agreed with University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust and University of Chichester. It is also in collaboration with the ARC KSS Living Well with Dementia theme.

How would you describe your journey so far as a PhD student? The highs? The challenges?

My PhD journey started off challenging, since I started back in 2021 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of places were still in lockdown, so it was difficult to meet people. Some of the highs of my PhD journey were hitting major milestones including submitting my first research proposal and ethics application to both the University of Chichester and the Health Research Authority and receiving approval to carry out my project. This year I have managed to share some of the results from my first study at the Sussex Clinical Academic Conference. I intend to write my first paper this year.

What are the highlights of your PhD project?

My major highlights have been achieving major milestones on the PhD and getting the opportunity to present my work at different research conferences. In addition, my PCIE work with the Dementia Hive has been a huge highlight. It has been a really great experience working with people living with dementia and their caregivers.

What advice / tips would you give someone thinking about undertaking taking a PhD?

- To stay organised
- You need to be flexible and be able to adapt because things will change along the way.
- To network and reach out to as many people as you can.
- To take care of your mental health. Taking on a PhD is a huge undertaking, and therefore, it's important to have strategies in place to help manage the stress and workload of a PhD project.
- To try and enjoy the journey as much as you can.

What's next? What are your plans for the future?

I'm not sure of my plans for the future. I am hoping to continue working as a clinical academic, once I have completed my PhD. I believe that these roles are so important in the NHS or any health and social care institution because it helps to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice.