

Monica Oancea

[ARC KSS](#) academy is working in collaboration with the Research Design Service South East (RDS SE) to bring you inspirational stories from researchers across our region and top tips for establishing a research career.

Monica is a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Palliative Care at St Barnabas House hospice, West Sussex. She has recently been awarded an NIHR Pre-doctoral Clinical Academic Fellowship. We met her to find out more.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? Currently I work as a specialist nurse based in Goring-by-Sea. Really, over ten years, my work has been cancer-related and then I moved into palliative care when I joined St Barnabas. I currently spend half of my time academically.

Q: Have you always been involved in research? I always have been, but very much wanted to be since my research Masters in Spain. Although, when we moved to the UK, I wanted to keep thinking about how to move forward. I decided to get used to the work here and see how the system works. When I was surer, that made me think ok, that's the time for me to continue as a researcher.

Q: You were awarded a Florence Nightingale research scholarship, tell us about that? So that happened because I was looking to do a PhD in my area at the hospice and one consultant was looking to start a Research Interest Group. I was certainly interested from a nursing side, so we set up it up voluntarily at lunchtimes. We needed some allocated research time, so looking around, I found the Florence Nightingale Scholarship. The clinical director at the hospice invited the CEO from Florence Nightingale to talk to us about their scholarships. I applied and got it. My scholarship was two days a week to focus on building research capacity and capability at the hospice. It was a fantastic opportunity.

Q: So what was your next challenge? So one of the objectives of my scholarship was to do something to grow. I always wanted to do my PhD

but I needed to do my training to enable me to then write a proposal and set up a project, I knew my weaknesses. I needed to learn how to write for publication. So that was the start and then we looked at what avenues there were. The best was the NIHR pathway and the Postdoctoral Clinical Academic Fellowship (PCAF). So I started attending some seminars to understand what this application meant and how I was going to do it and I was encouraged by my mentor. It is very competitive and I didn't have much experience in publication. I think Florence Nightingale scholarship showed my commitment and enthusiasm to it.

Q: Congratulations! So what does having this PCAF fellowship mean? I have two years and fifty percent of my time funded to prepare to submit a PhD application. My interest is outcome measurement in palliative care. How can we improve patient symptoms at home? How can we provide the best care for the challenging symptoms patients and their families are facing? I have already started, I need to do a scoping review and refine my research questions. So it's very intense.

Q: So what's been the biggest challenge for you in terms of trying to get on the research pathway and where you wanted to be? I think the biggest challenge was really to submit my PCAF application. I learnt so much. I wasn't very convinced at the beginning when it said the application needed three supervisors to align with my areas of research and I needed, in just a few pages, to



really sell myself. Anyway, I gave it a go and submitted the application and I've been successful! Selling myself was a challenge but I've put so much work into my research without realizing, and I had my mentor's words, "you have to carry on, don't give up. You've done a lot of work".

Q: What one piece of advice would you give to others that may be in a similar position to you or are interested in a research career? I would say, because obviously when you start you are interested in research and it sounds frightening, it sounds so academic and you feel you're not at that level and how you're going to even dream of that. Just set up your goal, your vision and what you'd like to do and work towards it and enjoy every single part. There is a very famous Spanish professor who says it's one percent intelligence and ninety-nine percent work. So work very hard, every single step, every path towards your goal. It's possible.

ARC KSS would like to thank Monica for sharing her work and research journey and we wish her good luck in her PCAF fellowship.

Find out more about NIHR PCAF funding [here](#).

Find out more about the work of St Barnabas House hospice [here](#).

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