

Individual Development Award (IDA) Springboard Award

Aimed at individuals employed by a health or social care organisation who are an [ARC KSS member organisation](#) to undertake activities aimed at developing research skills.

Exploring the barriers and facilitators to carrying out blood pressure checks in community optometric settings to improve detection of hypertension in the local community

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What did you achieve through this award? Refer to your original objectives in your application.

In line with my original objectives, I have conducted a literature review to explore the barriers and facilitators for optometrists' involvement in blood pressure case-finding schemes. I have also analysed the current evidence concerning community pharmacy as a setting for health promotion schemes. A key area of debate is whether public health interventions in pharmacies really address health inequalities. This suggests new research into health prevention interventions for hard-to-reach groups is needed. I made contact with the Medway Public Health Engagement Team to explain my project idea and I was sign-posted to the Medway Diversity Forum Lead with whom I discussed the possibility of arranging a focus group to explore acceptance of an optician/optometrist practice's blood pressure service, particularly within the black and ethnic minority community.

I have developed a survey to capture views of optometrists on providing a blood pressure service. This will be piloted with a few optometrists before being widely distributed through the Local Optical Committee (LOC). Although not one of my original objectives, I have written an abstract from my project work which has been accepted for a poster presentation at The College of Optometrists annual conference in Telford in April 2024.

What has this award meant for you? What has it enabled you to do?

The award has enabled me to access training which will be relevant to specific areas of my research as it progresses – for example, questionnaire design, and qualitative research and sampling techniques. I have benefitted from having the time to become more confident in my knowledge of the current literature. I have been able to apply the skills I have learned in the ICAP programme to critically analyse the literature and understand some of the limitations of the research findings. I have also gained more clarity and focus to my research question.



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It has also opened up new lines of inquiry. The award has enabled me to incorporate a Making Every Contact Count (MECC) approach during routine consultations with 'at risk' patients who present for an eye examination and signpost them to their GP. Through the award, I have been able to make contacts with local stakeholders - the local Primary Care Network and Medway Diversity Forum, which I would not have been able to achieve otherwise. I have also had an opportunity to 'shadow' an optician-based cardiovascular prevention pilot scheme. This has added to my learning and may lead to opportunities for collaboration. The award has given me an opportunity to share my research with my peers through submitting an abstract of my project to the College of Optometrists. This has been accepted for a poster presentation at an optometry conference, which may generate interest and further discussion within the profession.

What's next?

The next phase of my research will be developing an optician-based blood pressure protocol. I plan to continue to progress my research alongside working in practice by applying for further funding either through the ARC or my professional college small grant awards scheme. I would like to collaborate with others in regard to evaluation of similar interventions. Public involvement through community links is a key enabler in addressing health inequalities – and my focus would be on identifying the cohort of patients who may present to opticians but not elsewhere. I would also like to conduct a peer focus group to guide the research design of a pilot BP scheme. Whilst not in my immediate plans, I may consider an academic pathway such as a Masters in Health Research.

What is your experience of receiving mentorship as part of this award?

I have had a very positive experience of mentorship during the course of the award. I have received encouragement, making (in my opinion) small steps seem like achievements. My mentor(s) have been invaluable in helping me to focus my efforts to produce meaningful outputs. They have made suggestions and been very responsive to my concerns, often sharing examples from their own work. Their commitment has been maintained throughout. Both my ARC mentors have been available to address queries by email, in addition to the monthly face-to-face sessions which have helped with forward-planning. I have not felt that an issue is too small to raise! The mentor's expertise has supported me to take my work to the next level and to help me to fulfil my potential.