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# Newsletter

**CHSS**  
University of Kent

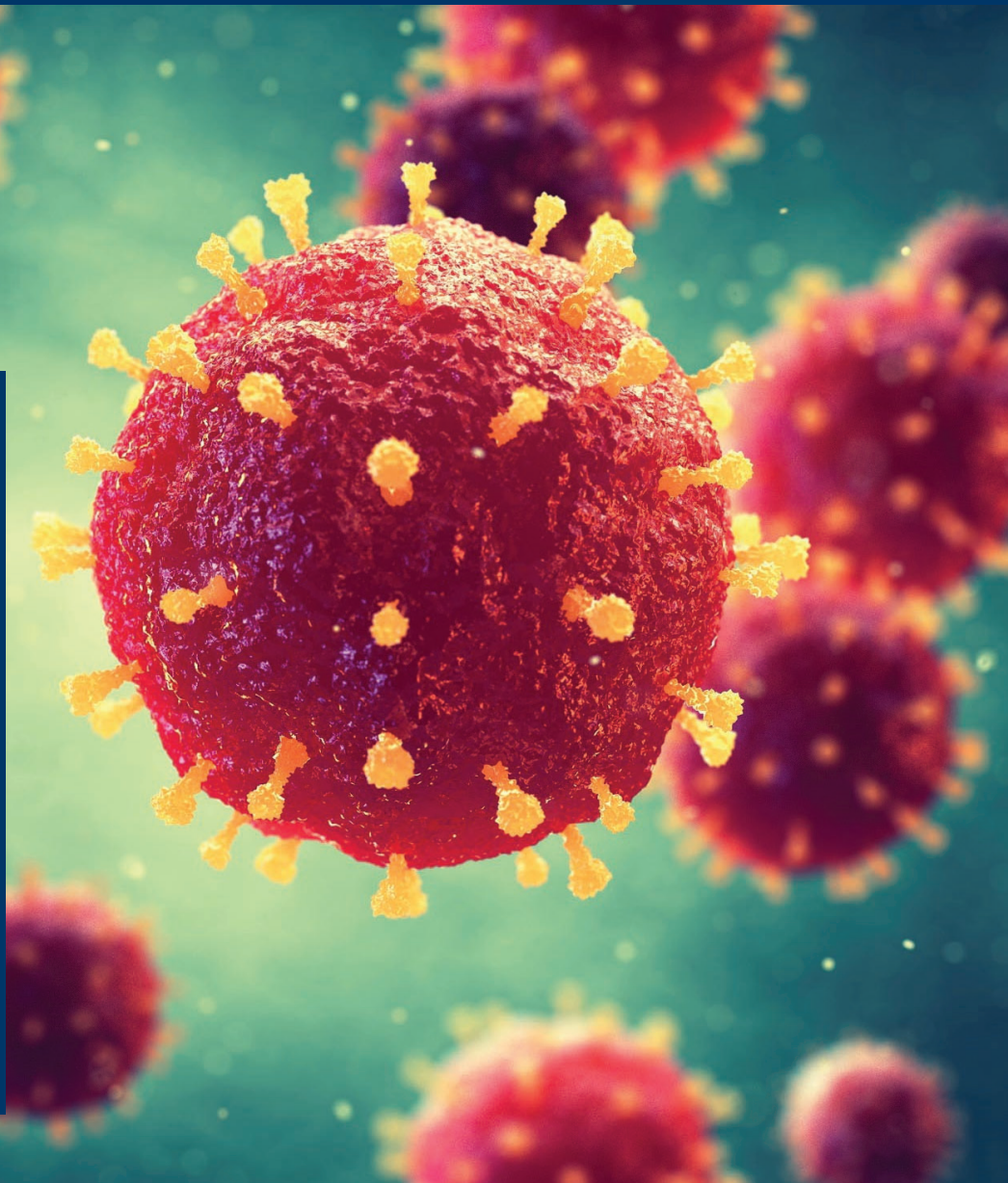
Centre for Health Services Studies

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## CHSS researchers join the fight against COVID-19

At this unprecedented time of pandemic, CHSS, like many organisations, is currently operating from the homes of staff rather than a shared working environment. Our work conducting high quality health and social care services research, and supporting the region's researchers continues, albeit virtually. Research is more pressing and crucial than ever. Some of the CHSS team have received funding for COVID-19 research, and we continue to submit bids for funds to support more projects.

Some of our clinical academic staff have returned to the frontline after periods away from clinical practice, to join the fight against the virus. We send our best wishes to all, and especially those friends and colleagues working within the NHS and social care sector in these challenging times.



Excellence in health research

# CHSS news

## COVID-19: CHSS in the media

CHSS staff have delivered plenty of expert comment to news media throughout the pandemic – both before and during the lockdown. Some have written opinion pieces while others appeared on national or regional TV and radio to comment on aspects of the Coronavirus outbreak. Below are some highlights.



### BBC Worklife: What to do with friends who don't social distance

**Reader in Health Psychology Dr Kate Hamilton-West** gives insight into social distancing behaviours as lockdown restrictions begin to be eased. In this article, she talks about managing relationships at a time of possible tension where friends share different beliefs on the rules.



### Kent Tonight, KMTV – 20/4/2020 (6m15s into broadcast)

At the peak of recorded cases in England, **Research Associate Dr Rasa Mikelyte** highlighted a crisis in care homes, where inadequate PPE supplies were causing great concern and putting lives at risk.



### Air quality during lockdown

CHSS Director Stephen Peckham's fascinating piece in the *Canterbury Society Newsletter* talks about the implications of lockdown for air quality. How is air quality changing under Lockdown? Where do we go from here? What are the links between lung damage caused by pollution and susceptibility to COVID-19?



### The Psychologist: Supporting research that is truly valid and meaningful for the public

**Senior Research Fellow and Chartered Psychologist Dr Sarah Hotham** co-authored this timely piece around meaningful patient and public involvement and engagement in COVID-19 research. Should we aim for perfection or pragmatism?



**Senior Clinical Research Fellow Dr Lindsay Forbes** gave several local and national media interviews around COVID-19 prior to lockdown, including *ITV Meridian News* with Fred Dinenage. More recently she gave expert comment on Kent's infection rate distribution and the possibility of a 'second wave' (see p3).

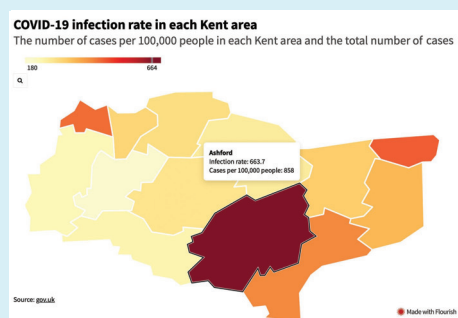


### Interdisciplinary research and neglected areas

**Chief Medical Officer Professor Sir Chris Whitty** is now a household name, and a familiar face at daily Government COVID briefings. In October, we were fortunate enough to have him deliver our 2019 CHSS Annual Lecture around interdisciplinary research. His words inspired **Research Associate Rebecca Cassidy** to write this blog, now available on the NIHR website.

# News from NIHR partners

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## Kent's virus 'hotspot'

Dr Lindsay Forbes comments on why Ashford is Kent's COVID-19 hotspot while Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling and Sevenoaks have seen much lower rates.

'The data do not tell us to what extent people living in each Kent district have been able to keep away from others. People in key worker jobs have had to keep going out to work – often with insufficient protective equipment. It is much easier to avoid infection if you work at home, or are furloughed. Ashford has one of the highest proportions of key workers in England at about 40%. In West Kent it is below 28%.

'When it comes to deaths from COVID-19, it is better news for Ashford – rates are less than the average for England. Dartford has the worst Kent death rates to date, which may be because it is more densely populated and more ethnically diverse'.

See the full [expert comment on the University of Kent website](#).

## A second wave of COVID-19?

Lindsay joined *BBC Radio Kent Breakfast* to discuss a possible second wave of infection after lockdown. (19 June, starts 1h12m)

'Flu mutates quickly to give a new version each year. We don't know with COVID. Hopefully we can contain any second wave with test, trace and isolate. Contact tracing has been used in sexual health for years.

'It's important that the messaging is right about the critical importance of isolating if you come in contact with someone known to be infected. We have to prevent lockdowns to get the economy going again. It's important to remember that poverty and unemployment cause ill health too'.

## Research Design Service SE

The RDS SE have a dedicated webpage with information about the service during the current pandemic including prioritising COVID-19 research. There is also valuable new guidance on public involvement.

Researchers currently receive RDS support online rather than meeting face to face. A full RDS events programme (See p8) to help health and social care researchers with the research application journey, continues through platforms such as Zoom. RDS SE will be adding to their [new events video resources](#) online in the coming months, so if you miss something, you can catch up! Currently available:

- **RDS SE NIHR funding programmes workshop** 22/4/20 (includes sessions on NIHR funding programmes, writing a fundable proposal and the what, why and how of PPI in research).
- **RDS SE Webinar:** Public Health Research – context and challenges

## RDS #homeworking during #lockdown



Homeworking is a new and challenging experience for some RDS staff. Regular team meetings and virtual catch-ups keep everyone connected, but some across the region resorted to various innovative tools to navigate the current situation. They

include yoga, painting and for **new PPI Strategic Lead Gary Hickey**, cakes baked by kindly neighbours! See Twitter for more details [@NIHR\\_RDSSE #homeworking](#)

[Contact RDS SE](#) for support with your research, particularly around COVID-19.

**NIHR** | Research Design Service South East

## Applied Research Collaboration, Kent, Surrey, Sussex

In a busy first year, ARC KSS has been working with member organisations, communities and partners, while prioritising COVID-19-related activity.

The team has added four new Implementation Managers to lead key research themes, a Public and Community Team Leader and a Communications Manager. Public Advisers appointed to the Board have been peer reviewing COVID applications.

ARC KSS has funded **nine COVID-19 Rapid Response studies** exploring the pandemic's impact on communities and services across the three counties. **Director of CHSS and ARC KSS, Professor Stephen Peckham** said: 'I am delighted that we have been able to fund these studies to help us understand what life is like for many people and their carers during the pandemic. We will be listening and speaking with selected people across Kent, Surrey and Sussex including those caring for people with dementia, young people and families with mental health conditions, and other vulnerable

communities such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and elderly people in care homes. This will help us understand what could be done to improve health and care services'.

NIHR national priority funding for Adult Social Care and Social Work, was awarded to ARC KSS to help our region lead the way in adult social care research through a national priority network in collaboration with eight ARCs across England.

A new website is under construction, but dedicated ARC KSS pages with more information about the Collaboration – including latest news, events, funding and training and development opportunities – are available on the [Sussex Partnership website](#).

Follow ARC KSS on Twitter: @ARC\_KSS

**NIHR** | Applied Research Collaborations Kent, Surrey and Sussex

# New CHSS projects

## Community-based volunteering during COVID-19

During COVID-19 many older and vulnerable people at high risk are shielding to protect themselves from the virus. Many live alone and cannot access food supplies or prescriptions. Cut off from normal social interaction, this group are left particularly vulnerable and isolated.



A surge of local community goodwill has seen many people signing up as volunteers to help local organisations support this group. But what impact does a community-based volunteer workforce have on providing support for self-isolating and vulnerable older members of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic? Individual communities have implemented volunteer support in different ways, so what is the best way to rapidly and safely set up and implement such an initiative to support vulnerable and isolated people who need help?

These questions are at the core of a new project funded by the NIHR ARC KSS (Applied Research Collaboration Kent Surrey Sussex). Professor Tricia Wilson leads the project, focusing on voluntary support for older people across the KSS region who are self-isolating.

The team, including CHSS researchers Dr Julie MacInnes, Dr Vanessa Abrahamson and Sabrena Jaswal, are conducting a rapid evidence review on the implementation and impact of different approaches to organising and supporting volunteers. How do health and social care and voluntary sector organisations recruit and train volunteers, and how do they work together with services?

Using qualitative phone interviews with health and social care practitioners, those organising and supporting volunteers, volunteers themselves and the people they help, they will see how COVID-19 has impacted on pre-existing volunteer services. A report on findings will be produced in August, which will include key implementation points and guidance, including how to sustain a volunteer workforce after COVID-19.

Tricia said: 'Our priority is to see what kind of support the volunteers give and what difference they make. Plenty of evidence shows the vital role of volunteers. Our OPEL Hospice at Home Project findings suggest that carers welcome volunteer help, but hospices and organisations have concerns about liability, reputational risk and health and safety. We want to find the safest and best way to quickly set up a volunteer workforce to help these isolated people in the community.'

'Our partner organisations will have easy guidance to follow about safely and rapidly setting it up and what kind of impact to expect. The project will look at policy documents to draw out evidence and lessons which could easily be transferable to other isolated older people beyond the COVID-19, a group which historically has not been well supported before'.

# Research updates

## 1001 critical days for mother and infant

**Dr Natalia Gusak is working with Professor Sally Kendall and Dr Olena Nizalova on an important collaborative study which explores factors affecting mental health and wellbeing of mothers and infants in Ukraine.**

Natalia joins CHSS Centre until August. She is Head of the School of Social Work Department at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine. Her postdoctoral appointment is funded by the Global Challenges Doctoral Centre.



The project is also evaluating the potential of Primary Health Care to play a role in improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

The project will produce evidence on mental health among pregnant women and mothers in the 1001 days from conception to two years – a critical time in child brain development and physical, social and emotional well-being. Evidence shows that adverse childhood experiences – deprivation, neglect, substance misuse, maternal mental health problems and any form of abuse – can negatively affect this period.

The project focuses on three main areas; antenatal care, mothers' mental health before and after giving birth, and breastfeeding. Whilst there is some existing data on antenatal care and breastfeeding in Ukraine, the picture around maternal mental health is less clear. However, indirect evidence suggests that the situation is a dire one, with a combination of existing factors that are likely to lead to high burden of mental health problems in mothers.

The scoping study will explore existing maternal mental health service provision: awareness, experience, use and satisfaction with quality, and test online research instruments around mothers' mental health in the Ukraine setting.

The team will use the data to develop a Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) research agenda on maternal and infant health in post-Soviet countries, and to prepare for a wider and fuller future study.



## Assessing impact of virtual patient consultations for NHS psychological interventions

**CHSS Senior Research Fellow Dr Sarah Hotham leads a new four month evaluation to find out what impact virtual consultations are having on patient outcomes and quality of care, for people accessing NHS psychological interventions. The rapid introduction of virtual consultations to replace face to face interaction is one of many changes in health services delivery forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. NHS mental health services are at the forefront of this, with rapid transition to virtual sessions to deliver interventions.**

This study uses implementation science to discover what works best, for whom and in what circumstances, by exploring contextual factors influencing success or failure. Its central question is what defines 'quality' in virtual consultations and what barriers are there to achieving it? Do healthcare professionals view virtual consultations as acceptable, feasible and appropriate?

Funded by Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT), it will use the *RE-AIM* framework to evaluate how virtual therapy consultations are implemented, and assess their impact on patients.

CHSS Research Associate Rasa Mikelyte joins the evaluation team of KMPT Consultant Psychologists and Research and Development leads. The Trust's Experts by Experience group are involved in all patient and public involvement aspects of the work.

The study will provide evidence around scaling up and maintaining virtual consultations beyond COVID-19, and benefit KMPT patients accessing – and staff providing – mental health services. Outputs for Trust Managers and commissioners to guide future care delivery will include a 'what to expect in your virtual consultation' leaflet for patients and carers.



# CHSS people

## Doctor in the House!

### Dr Lindsay Forbes, Senior Clinical Research Fellow (Public Health)

Lindsay joined CHSS in 2016. Her main research interests have been how primary care is organised and improving outcomes for people with cancer symptoms. On Zoom during lockdown, she said her current role is the most enjoyable of all those in her varied career.



#### How is lockdown going for you?

Better than I would have expected, with two teenagers in the house 24/7! Thank goodness for Netflix and all the technology we have!

#### Where did you grow up?

I was born in Oxford, the third of four kids. Dad was a GP and Mum an artist. We moved to the New Forest, when Dad started at the then new Southampton Medical School. I was best at English at school, but I took maths and science A levels to pursue a medical career.

#### How was the medical degree?

I studied at Guys and St. Thomas' Medical School, and I did an intercalated BSc in Medical Sociology as well. That was an eye opener, sparking my interest in public health research. It wasn't all studying though. I had a lot of fun sharing a flat in South London and was active in student journalism and politics. After graduating in 1988 I spent seven years as a junior doctor in acute medicine, moving hospital every 6-12 months, working in Sidcup, St Thomas', Brighton, Worthing, and Chichester.

#### Why the move into research?

Since medical school I had been interested in research. I tried to get research fellowships while I was working in acute medicine, but failed (now that I know how much work goes into a successful application, I can see why). In 1995 I got a job back at Guy's and St Thomas', lecturing students in epidemiology, while doing postgraduate public health training in South East London Health Authorities.

In 2003 I was appointed Consultant in Public Health at Wandsworth Primary Care Trust, and I got a grant with St George's Medical School to do some research into the health effects of poor air quality. Then I decided to make the move – not always an easy one – into full time research.

So in 2007 I got a job at King's College London researching how to promote earlier diagnosis of cancer. Cancer survival rates are poor here compared to other countries and this may be partly because people delay going to see their GP with cancer symptoms.

#### What brought you to Kent?

We were living in a flat in Paddington with two small children. We wanted them to have more freedom and space and I have family ties in Kent, so we moved in 2014, to Wye. But the commuting was no fun. I had heard of CHSS and went to chat to Stephen one day. I joined in 2016 after a Senior Clinical Research Fellow post came up.

#### How has CHSS been for you?

CHSS is a really good place to work. It's a great team of creative, interesting people and Stephen is a supportive Director. I've enjoyed helping develop research into general practice, children's mental health and building up public health research.

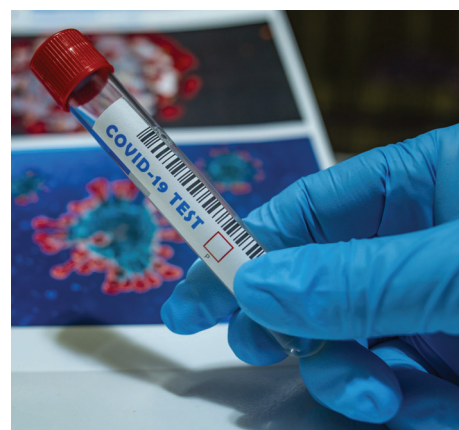
I spend some of the week as an RDS SE adviser. It keeps you in contact with local clinicians; research must be informed by what's happening in the real world. It keeps you on your toes and up to date with new methods.

#### Who has inspired your life and career?

Dad was always an inspiration. He was part of the movement to improve the quality of both undergraduate and postgraduate training in general practice in the 1970s. He was kind, honest, principled and funny. Professor David Blane taught me sociology in 1985 and inspired me to research health inequality and to act to tackle it.

#### Given your interest in primary care, did you ever want to be a GP?

I did consider it at one time. But now I am glad I am in academia. I love the way you are able to think creatively and are encouraged to challenge the received wisdom. Sometimes I miss clinical medicine, but mostly I think I am lucky to be in a position to make my small contribution to building new and better ways of preventing ill health and organising health services.



#### What are your views on how COVID-19 has gone?

The pandemic has shown us that NHS staff respond amazingly in a crisis. They organised themselves calmly to prioritise COVID-19 patients – despite 10 years of underfunding and consequent poor morale. There have been big problems with PPE supplies in health and especially social care and mass testing was very slow to get off the ground. The fragmented and underfunded social care system has been particularly badly hit, reflecting the value our society places on people who need social care.

#### What are your ambitions?

I want to help make CHSS an even stronger part of the University, building on its impressive record of getting external funding and providing research leadership for the local health economy. I really want to see the Kent and Medway Medical School succeed. It is really important for bringing in people and resources to strengthen our local health services.

#### And outside of work what are you passionate about?

I love reading, cycling and swimming. I feel strongly about promoting social justice and tackling climate change. Just in case I sound too worthy, I also like costume dramas, murder mysteries, comedy and wine. And chocolate.

# Featured CHSS publications

## Commissioning Healthcare in England: Evidence, Policy and Practice

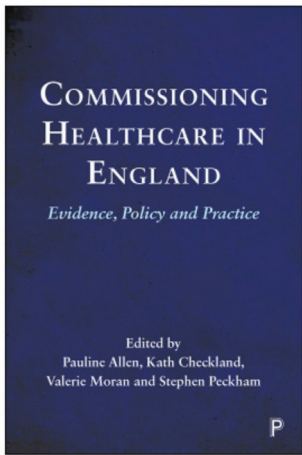
Pauline Allen, Kath Checkland, Valerie Moran and Stephen Peckham (eds), Policy Press

**Commissioning Healthcare in England**  
Evidence, Policy and Practice

Edited by Pauline Allen, Kath Checkland, Valerie Moran and Stephen Peckham

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	<b>Imprint</b>
	Policy Press



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**Commissioning has been a cornerstone of the NHS since the 1990s. This is the most comprehensive account yet of recent commissioning practice in the English NHS and its impact on health services and the healthcare system.**

The book brings together research conducted from 2011-18 by the Policy Research Unit in Commissioning and the Healthcare System (PRUComm), a research unit based at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the University of Manchester and the University of Kent. Funded by the Policy Research Programme of the English Department of Health and Social Care, PRUComm provides evidence to inform the development of policy on commissioning and the healthcare system.

Co-authored by PRUComm Director, Professor Stephen Peckham, the book shows how CCGs have been working and what this part of recent health policy in England has meant in practice. The analytical work supports understanding of how NHS commissioning operates, and how it can improve services and access, increase effectiveness and better respond to patient and population needs.

The authors analyse crucial aspects of commissioning, including competition and cooperation, the development of Clinical Commissioning Groups and consider the influence of recent commissioning reforms on public health infrastructure.

More information: <https://prucomm.ac.uk/commissioning-healthcare-book-launch.html>

### Selected recent CHSS publications

Allen P, Checkland K, Moran V and Peckham S eds. (2020) *Commissioning Healthcare in England: Evidence, Policy and Practice*. Policy Press, 181 pp. ISBN 978-1-4473-4613-5

Peckham S, Hudson B, Hunter D J, Redgate S & White G (2020) *Improving choices for care: a strategic research initiative on the implementation of the care act 2014*. National Institute for Health Research

MacInnes J (2020) *Care navigators' decision-making in prescribing Telecare for older people. Health and Social Care in the Community*. ISSN 0966-0410

MacInnes J, Jaswal S K, Mikelyte R & Billings J (2020) *Implementing an Integrated Acute Response Service: Professional Perceptions of Intermediate Care. Journal of Integrated Care*. ISSN 1476-9018

Barker R, Wilson P M & Butler C (2020) *Does national policy in England help deliver better and more consistent care for those at the end of life? Journal of Health Service Research and Policy* ISSN 1355-8196 E-ISSN 1758-1060

Mugweni E, Lowenhoff C, Walker M, Jaswal S, Emrys-Jones A, Adams C & Kendall S (2020) *The feasibility of a multi-professional training to improve how health care professionals deliver different news to families during pregnancy and at birth. Child: Care, Health and Development* ISSN 0305-1862 E-ISSN 1365-2214

Schrag A, Zhelev S S, Hotham S, Merritt R K, Khan K & Graham L (2019) *Heterogeneity in progression of prodromal features in Parkinson's disease. Parkinsonism & Related Disorders*. ISSN 1353-8020. E-ISSN 1873-5126

Rees-Roberts M, Williams P, Hashem F, Brigden C L, Greene K & Gage H et al (2019) *Hospice at Home services in England: a national survey. BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care*, ISSN 2045-435X

Details of all CHSS research is available on our website:  
[www.kent.ac.uk/chss/research/current.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/chss/research/current.html)

# CHSS staff news

Information about all CHSS staff is available on our website: [www.kent.ac.uk/chss/staff](http://www.kent.ac.uk/chss/staff)  
Details of our current vacancies and studentships: [www.kent.ac.uk/chss/vacancies.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/chss/vacancies.html)

## Welcome to:



**Dr Natalia Gusak**  
Visiting Professor

Natalia, Head of the School of Social Work at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine joins the Centre until August. Her postdoctoral appointment is funded by the Global Challenges Doctoral Centre. She is working with Professor Sally Kendall and Dr Olena Nizalova on a study around mental health and wellbeing of mothers and infants in Ukraine.



**Debbie Hayward**  
NIHR ARC KSS  
Administrator

Debbie is providing research administration support for the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Kent Surrey Sussex. She joined CHSS in April, from the University of Kent's Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UJET).

## Congratulations to:



**Boniface Oyugi**  
Commonwealth PhD  
Scholarship Student

Boniface was recently awarded a University of Kent Graduate School Prize for Postgraduate Research, with particular recognition for publications and grants.

## About CHSS

CHSS is a centre of research excellence which undertakes high quality research into a wide range of health systems and health services issues at local, national and international levels. CHSS also supports and advises health care staff to develop and undertake research projects. CHSS collaborates with a wide range of partners in Kent, the UK and in other countries to improve the links between research, policy and practice.

Please see the CHSS website for details of current and previous research and publications.

Details of current CHSS vacancies and studentships can be found at:  
[www.kent.ac.uk/chss/vacancies.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/chss/vacancies.html)

## NIHR Research Design Service South East

**RDS SE – FREE advice  
and support on all aspects  
of research design**  
[www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk)

Since 2008 CHSS has hosted the RDS SE at the University of Kent. The service also operates from the Universities of Brighton and Surrey. During COVID-19, RDS SE continues to support those developing health and social care research applications and continuing to deliver an online programme of events.

## RDS SE webinars for social care researchers

These webinars aim to support high quality applications for social care research funding.

### Coming up

**Webinar 3:** 8 July – Social care research involving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities

**Webinar 4:** 9 September – Dissemination and wider impact strategies in social care research

### Available online

**Webinar 1:** Public involvement and ethics and governance in social care research

**Webinar 2:** Social care research involving older adults

[www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk/outreach-and-events/video-resources-2](http://www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk/outreach-and-events/video-resources-2)

**Information about all RDS SE events:**  
[www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk/outreach-and-events/upcoming-events](http://www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk/outreach-and-events/upcoming-events)

