2016 was a very successful year for grant awards in the Epidemiology group. The LIFT randomised controlled trial (CI Neil Basu) – examining ways to manage fatigue in various rheumatic conditions – got underway, as did the DyNAMISM study (CI Gareth Jones) – which will examine whether inflammation on imaging is affected by subjects taking NSAID medication at the time of evaluation. Kathryn Martin was awarded a grant in the first round of the Arthritis Research UK Health Services Research call for a study implementing a US- programme “Walk with Ease” for persons with musculoskeletal conditions, and this study will begin in 2017. Not forgetting our ongoing studies: the British Society for Rheumatology Biologics Register for patients with axial Spondyloarthritis met its recruitment target of just over 2000 subjects during 2016 – but funding has been secured for the register to continue until 2018 in order to examine a wider range of outcomes, including quality of life and work-related issues.

At the beginning of 2017 we will officially launch the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health, which will bring together musculoskeletal work across the Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS), the Institute of Applied Health Sciences (IAHS) and NHS Grampian, and look forward to welcoming the Chancellor of the University (the Duchess of Rothesay) to help us do so. We also look forward to welcoming back Dr. Neil Basu during 2017 from his sabbatical at the University of Michigan.

Professor Gary J Macfarlane, Head of the Epidemiology Group
We said hello to ...

Dr Eva-Maria Bachmair

Eva joined the Epidemiology group as LIFT study co-ordinator in September 2016. She graduated from the University of Aberdeen in 2013 with a PhD where she studied the effect of dietary fatty acids on platelet function at the Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health. Whilst Eva’s work to date has primarily focused upon the effect of diet on cardiovascular disease, this exciting new role will give her the opportunity to develop her experience of clinical trial management within the University.

Kaja Kristensen

Kaja joined the Epidemiology Group in September 2016 as a visiting student from Germany. She is in the third year of her Bachelor in Public Health and has made her way to Aberdeen to gain practical experience before she completes her degree in summer 2017.

Giles O’Donovan

Giles joined the Epidemiology group as a Group Secretary in May 2016. Giles re-joins the group after working for two years as a Membership Coordinator for the Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland (ICAS).

Joanna Shim

Jo is a chartered physiotherapist with a clinical interest in neurology, having graduated from Cardiff University with first class honours. She earned her PhD in 2015 from the University of Southampton, investigating symptoms of lung cancer to improve early diagnosis. She was a post-doctoral research fellow for the Understanding Consequences study; a project funded by Prostate Cancer UK to develop a complex intervention to support men’s understanding of the consequences of localised prostate cancer treatments, before joining the Epidemiology Group at the University of Aberdeen. Jo has years of experience in quantitative and qualitative research supporting her new role as research fellow. She will be leading the analysis on the TRIO study; a multi-centred RCT to evaluate the effects of targeted rehabilitation following total knee arthroplasty, and will also be exploring a series of work outcomes on the SIRAS and BSRBR-AS data.
and also goodbye to ....

Katie Druce, having completed her PhD, left to take up a post-doc position with one of our UK-RiME partners at the University of Manchester. Dr. Sohinee Bhattacharya left to join the Obstetrics and Gynaecology while at the end of the year Professor Phyo Myint and the AGEING theme became a separate group within the IAHS. We wish them all well.

Reports from our research programmes ....

Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases (RMD)

Another productive year in the Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Disease programme. Across the group, we published 18 papers, with a further six accepted and in press; and again we retained a presence at the main national and international meetings in rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease, including:

• One oral presentation, and four posters at the British Society for Rheumatology, of which the former comprised the first oral presentation of data from the British Society for Rheumatology Biologics Register for Ankylosing Spondylitis (BSRBR-AS);
• Two posters at the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR);
• Three posters, at the biennial International Congress on Spondyloarthritides including the first international presentation of BSRBR-AS data, and also the first BSRBR-AS external collaboration;
• Two oral presentations and three posters (a 100% acceptance rate) at the American College of Rheumatology.

Also collecting air-miles:

• Daniel Whibley represented the university at the International Student Research Forum, in Beijing; and
• Neil Basu began a twelve month sabbatical at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)

The programme was awarded six research grants, totalling around £850,000, including three from our largest funder, Arthritis Research UK: two in spondyloarthritis, and one concerning a community-based walking programme for older adults with arthritis.

Other notable achievements in the programme: Abimbola Ayorinde graduated with PhD in June, and Yagna Bhattacharya, a medical student intern, was awarded best poster prize at the ‘Crucible’ Medical Student Conference in Edinburgh.
There have been several comings and goings over the year, and the group now stands at 22. However, the largest major change to the programme in 2016 is the coming together of the group with three other major research groups in the university:

• Arthritis and Regenerative Medicine Laboratory
• MRI Technology Research Group
• Biomaterials and Bone Regeneration Group

plus the clinical Department of Rheumatology at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, to form the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health. This cements our status as a EULAR Centre of Excellence in Rheumatology, and creates an exciting hub of research activity in rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease, ranging from the biomolecular, through to clinical medicine, to applied health and population research.
Focus on Studies: The LIFT trial

Fatigue is pervasive, disabling and challenging to manage across all inflammatory rheumatic diseases (IRDs).

Primarily, we seek to advance the implementation of fatigue alleviating physical activity support programmes and cognitive-behavioural treatments within health services. The interventions will be delivered centrally, by either telephone or Skype, with view to enhancing cost-effectiveness. The conduct of such a pragmatic trial also presents an unique opportunity to a) investigate the underlying mechanisms of fatigue in order to optimise future interventions and b) identify the moderators of physical activity and cognitive-behavioural therapy efficacy so as to inform future stratified trials and patient triage pathways. This multi-disciplinary trial brings together all three IAHS themes as well as a number of international leaders in the field. If successful, it has the potential to unlock widespread access to much needed therapies and will provide vital insights into this commonly neglected patient priority.

Dr. Neil Basu (Chief Investigator)

Awards and Prizes

Emma Foster, an AGEING programme summer research students, won the prize at the Aberdeen Summer Research Scholarship event for her work examining the association between history of falls & fractures on both acute and long term mortality outcome of stroke. In the RMD programme, Daniel Whibley was awarded a bursary to attend the British Pain Society and at the same meeting, Abimbola Ayorinde won 2nd prize in the oral prize presentations. Shifa Sarica was awarded the prize at the Scottish Society for Rheumatology Autumn meeting, for the best oral presentation. Ross MacDonald a 2nd year undergraduate student in Mathematics at the University of St Andrews was awarded a Medical Research Scotland Summer Studentship and worked under the supervision of Daniel Whibley. Anna Rose (BSc MedSci student), working within the Reproductive Health Programme, won the prize for best presentation at the Northern Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society meeting in Elgin. Anna’s project was “Trends in delivery by Caesarean section: are thresholds for intervention falling and neonatal outcomes improving?” Anna also presented at the International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (FIGO) World Congress in Vancouver.
Grads

Abimbola Ayorinde – June 2016
Manuscripts Published in 2016

RMD Programme

1. Atzeni et al. Do Anti-TNF blockers increase the risk of lung involvement in patients with ankylosing spondylitis or psoriatic arthritis? A systematic review. Israel Medical Association Journal 2016; 18; 154-5.


RMD programme – epub / online first, 2016


Grants

**RMD Programme**

Out and About 2017

Gary Macfarlane and Gareth Jones at the International Ankylosing Society Meeting in Berlin

The inaugural of the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health
Staff and Postdoctoral Students List 2017

**Academic Staff**

Professor Gary J Macfarlane *Chair (Clinical) in Epidemiology and Head of Group*
Dr Gareth T Jones *Reader in Epidemiology*
Dr Neil Basu *Clinical Senior Lecturer in Rheumatology*
Dr Kathryn R Martin *Lecturer in Epidemiology*
Dr Linda E Dean *Research Fellow*
Dr. Maxwell Barnish, *Research Assistant*

**Academic-related staff**

Mr Marcus Beasley *Study Co-ordinator (TRIO-Popular)*
Dr. Karen Forrest Keenan *Study Co-ordinator (Vasculitis Study)*
Dr Claudia Zabke *Study Co-ordinator (BSRBR-AS)*
Dr Elizabeth A Jones *Assistant Study Co-ordinator (BSRBR-AS)*
Mr Mark Esson *Project Assistant*
Mr Barry Morris, *Project Assistant*

**Honorary Staff**

Dr. Tatiana Macfarlane, *Honorary Reader*
Dr Fabiola Atzeni *Honorary Clinical Research Fellow*
Dr Gabriele Simonini *Honorary Clinical Research Fellow*
Dr Katie Druce *Honorary Research Fellow*

**Post-graduate research students**

Mr Daniel Whibley *PhD student*
Miss Shifa Sarica *PhD Student*
Ms Kathleen Lamont *PhD Student*
Ms Kinga Janik-Koncewicz *PhD student*
Mrs Hadeel Abood *PhD student*
Mrs LaKrista Morton *PhD student*