The year 2017 was an incredibly successful year for the Epidemiology Group. In the first quarter we moved to the Health Sciences Building on the Foresterhill Health Campus and had the convenience of us all being in one location rather than split over several locations. The move gave us room for expansion and we have indeed welcomed many people to the group during the year.

We have formally started several studies or started recruitment to these studies, such as LIFT (examining management of fatigue in rheumatic diseases), Walk with Ease (a community based walking programme), FOMaXS (examining the co-occurrence of fibromyalgia and axial Spondyloarthritis) and DyNAMISM (investigating the assessment of inflammation in patients with axSpa). At the other end of the project timeline, we recruited our final participant to the British Society for Rheumatology Biologics Register in Ankylosing Spondylitis (BSRBR-AS) and will now concentrate on maximising analysis opportunities from this national register.

We had a royal visit at the beginning of 2017 with the Chancellor of the University, the Duchess of Rothesay, visiting to celebrate the work of the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health.

In terms of academic staff we welcomed Dr. Rosemary Hollick as Clinical Senior Lecturer and we welcomed back Dr. Neil Basu from his sabbatical at the University of Michigan. Amongst all the notable successes, Daniel Whibley’s Arthritis Research UK postdoctoral fellowship stands out – representing the first such fellowship success from this source. The year ahead will present its challenges, I am sure, but we can go into the New Year in very good research health.

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

Rieke Baumkotter

Rieke joined the Epidemiology Group as a visiting student from Germany in October 2017. She is in her third year of a Public Health Bachelor programme and came to Aberdeen to learn more epidemiological and methodological skills.

Laura Bruno

Laura Bruno joined the Epidemiology Group in September 2016 as a visiting student from Germany. She is doing her research internship with the group, in which she explores healthcare utilisation in patients with ANCA-associated vasculitis, a rare autoimmune condition. The internship is embedded in her Master’s program Health Sciences at the University of Applied Sciences in Hamburg.

Michelle Cloude

Michelle is currently working as the Project Assistant on the Walk With Ease study in Aberdeen. She joins us having come from a career in finance.
Linda Dean

Linda re-joined the Epidemiology Group in November 2017 after a period of maternity leave and work as a lecturer within North East Scotland College. She earned her PhD in Epidemiology from the University of Aberdeen in 2015, investigating the epidemiology of ankylosing spondylitis (AS) utilizing the Scotland Registry for Ankylosing Spondylitis (SIRAS). This was followed by research positions focussing on the definition and management of AS flares, work outcome within musculoskeletal conditions and work contributing to the development of a new taxonomy for fibromyalgia. Linda’s current research interests remain within musculoskeletal disorders and within the Epidemiology Group she fulfils the role of data analyst for the British Society for Rheumatology, Biologics Register - Ankylosing Spondylitis (BSRBR-AS).

Stefanie Döbl

Stefanie commenced her IAHS/Elphinstone PhD scholarships with the Epidemiology Group in October 2017. Her PhD project focuses on ways of improving health care delivery to patients with fibromyalgia. She is supervised by Prof Gary Macfarlane, Dr Rosemary Hollick (both University of Aberdeen) and Prof Ernest Choy (Cardiff University).

Stefanie’s professional background is in social work. She practiced as a social worker for twelve years, including working in an interdisciplinary primary health care practice and community-based mental health team. She received her Master of Health Sciences (First Class Honours) in 2013. Her research explored the social work integration into primary health care practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Adam Fletcher

Adam joined the Epidemiology group as a part of the MAmMOTH study in July 2017. He earned his MSc in Strategic Studies and International Law from the University of Aberdeen in 2015. Prior to joining Epidemiology group, Adam was involved in research elsewhere at the University, working with both quantitative and qualitative data as part of the Arab Transitions project.
Santosh Gaihre

Santosh is a trained public health researcher (mixed method research) with a career of around 10 years in environmental, lifestyle and social aspects of population health and health promotion research. He has expertise in a range of research settings, both in high and low-income settings. Santosh joined the Epidemiology Group as research fellow in July 2017 after completion of his PhD in Public Health from the University of Aberdeen. He is currently working in an Arthritis Research funded project called Walk With Ease (WWE) UK study, a community based walking programme for adults with arthritis and/or musculoskeletal conditions. His work primary focuses on ethnographic observation, using a video based ‘mobile ethnography’ and biographical narrative interviews to better understand cultural adaptation of the WWE programme content and resources to a UK population.

Maureen Heddle

In September 2017 Maureen joined the Epidemiology Group to become Assistant Study Coordinator of the British Society for Rheumatology Biologics Register for Ankylosing Spondylitis (BSRBR-AS). The register launched in 2012 and is currently in follow-up of the study participants. It monitors the long-term safety of biologic treatments and aims to increase our understanding of their effects on patients’ quality of life.

Prior to this she was part of the Aberdeen Health Psychology Group (AHPG) to work on the CSO funded project "Supporting healthy snack choices in Scottish hospitals: a feasibility study" (Principal Investigator: Dr Julia Allan). The project assessed the feasibility of a point-of-purchase intervention, to encourage healthier snack and drink choices amongst consumers, in retail and catering units within a hospital setting.

Maureen graduated from the University of Aberdeen with a BSc (Hons) in Health Sciences in 1998, a PG Certificate in Coaching in 2009, and an MSc in Public Health Research in 2016. Prior to joining the University of Aberdeen she worked delivering health behaviour change programmes and initiatives to a wide variety of patient and client groups for NHS Grampian, the North Sea offshore oil and gas industry, and the Third Sector.
Rosemary Hollick

Rosemary is a newly appointed Senior Clinical Lecturer and Rheumatologist. Her research interests seek to understand how best to organise and deliver effective person-centred care across a range of different healthcare settings. Rosemary is currently developing a new programme of work within the Aberdeen Centre for Musculoskeletal Health, using cutting edge health services research methodologies to inform timely, effective and sustainable improvements in health and well-being for those living with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions.

Ross MacDonald

Ross joined the Epidemiology Group in May 2017 as a Research Assistant. He has since started a PhD in October 2017 looking into the association between lifestyle factors and inflammatory arthritis, whilst continuing to work as a Research Assistant part-time. Ross graduated in June 2016 from the University of St Andrews where he was awarded a MMath Mathematics (Fast Track) degree.

Bhadra Mallawaarachchi

Bhadra joined the Epidemiology in 2017 for her Post-Doctoral placement. She is a Senior Registrar in Community Medicine in Sri Lanka holding MBBS, MSc (Community Medicine) and MD (Community Medicine). Bhadra has more than 15 years working experience in various aspects of Public Health in Sri Lanka. She earned her Doctorate in Community Medicine in 2016 from University of Colombo, Sri Lanka by exploring the prevalence and risk factors of adolescent disruptive behaviours. She has carried out collaborative research with the Global Health Institute, Duke University on Road Traffic Injuries in Galle, Sri Lanka.
Gladys Mcpherson

Gladys joined the Epidemiology group as part-time data co-ordinator for the LIFT trial in August 2017. She was previously employed by the University of Aberdeen for 16 years as IT Manager in CHaRT (Centre for Healthcare Randomised Trials) and took early retirement in 2015.

Gillian Smith

Gillian joined the Epidemiology group in November 2017 as a research assistant to Dr. Joanna Shim, as part of the Centre of Musculoskeletal Health in the Workplace (CMHW). Gillian graduated from the University of Aberdeen with a BSc (Hons) Biomedical Sciences (molecular Biology) in 2013 and spent several years working in the pharmaceutical and medical device industry. In 2017, she completed her Masters in Public Health at the University of Dundee.

and also goodbye to ....

Dr. Maxwell Barnish (research assistant) who left to take up a position at the University of Exeter and Sarah Murdoch (study co-ordinator, Walk with Ease) who took up a position in the NHS.

Update on Studies

Walk with Ease (CI: Dr. Kathryn Martin)

The benefits of physical activity (PA) on health are undisputed yet engaging in sufficient physical activity remains a major challenge for most adults across the UK. Engaging in and increasing physical activity can be especially challenging for individuals with arthritis or musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions due to physical symptoms and even fear of moving or injury.
Walk with Ease is a popular 6-week community-based walking programme developed by the Arthritis Foundation in the United States specifically for people with arthritis and MSK conditions. It has been shown to reduce arthritis-related symptoms such as pain, stiffness and fatigue, as well as improve strength, balance and walking pace. Based on this, Arthritis Research UK funded an 18-month study, ‘Walk With Ease -UK’, to explore whether people with these conditions might benefit from the programme here in the UK (CI: Martin).

A cultural adaptation of the Walk With Ease guidebook was undertaken and 149 participants were recruited from nine primary care practices in Aberdeen between June and September 2017. Following an initial physical performance assessment, participants were randomised into either receiving the walking programme or a booklet outlining physical activity opportunities in Aberdeen. Those who received the walking programme were given a pedometer and guidebook with the option to either walk with an instructor-led group or on their own. All participants were then re-assessed after six weeks and sent a questionnaire three months later. In addition, nearly 50 participants have taken part in an interview to discuss their experiences of the Walk With Ease programme and living with arthritis. Data analysis and result dissemination will take place in 2018.

Throughout the project, the research team has worked closely with patient partners and community organisations such as Sport Aberdeen, Aberdeen Sports Village, Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership and Paths For All to ensure the programme can fit within existing UK health and social care services long-term. It is hoped that Walk With Ease UK has the potential to increase quality of life through increased physical activity among inactive individuals with arthritis or MSK-conditions resulting in reduced health-related economic costs here in the UK.

Research Update

2017 was another productive year for the Epidemiology Group, with eleven papers published, and a further four accepted and in press. We also had a presence at all of the major national and international rheumatology conferences, including several oral presentations at both the British Society for Rheumatology and American College of Rheumatology annual scientific meetings.

Gary gave plenary lectures at the Italian Society for Rheumatology and the Canadian Pain Society, to name but a few, and Gareth gave a plenary lecture at the International Symposium on Pediatric Pain in Malaysia. Kathryn had a collaborative visit to the University of Massachusetts, and Neil returned from a successful sabbatical at the University of Michigan where he developed a collaboration which is being strengthened further in 2018. Daniel, successful in his application for an Arthritis Research UK Foundation Fellowship will be spending one year in Michigan, starting in the latter half of 2018.

We have had two successful PhD outcomes: Rosemary Hollick (in June) and Daniel Whibley (in November) both passed their viva voce with only minor corrections. We look forward to their graduation in June 2018.

In terms of studies, sadly, we saw the end of recruitment to the British Society for Rheumatology Biologics Register for Axial Spondyloarthritis (BSRBR-AS). Follow-up for this study, which has been recruiting since 2012, will cease in June 2018 and we move into several years of analysis. However, as one register comes to the end of its life, another is beginning. We secured £1.2million from the British Society for Rheumatology to run a similar register in psoriatic arthritis (BSRBR-PsA) which looks to start recruitment in summer 2018.
We also were awarded over £800,000 in other research funding, ranging from small awards for pilot work and qualitative investigations, to larger projects and fellowship. Specific notable awards are:

- Basu et al. Delineating the neural mediators of rheumatoid arthritis related fatigue. Chief Scientist Office. £278,850.
A Royal Visit

In January 2017 we welcomed the Chancellor of the University, the Duchess of Rothesay to the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, along with representatives of Arthritis Research UK and the National Osteoporosis Society, of which she is patron. As well as officially opening the new Rowett Institute for Nutrition and Health she toured the mobile bone scanner and heard about the work of the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health.

Principal Sir Ian Diamond talking to Professor Cosimo de Bari (Director of the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health) and the Duchess of Rothesay (Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen and Patron of Arthritis Research UK and the National Osteoporosis Society.)
Manuscripts Published in 2017

Manuscripts published / in press


• Steingrímsdóttir ÓA, Landmark T, Macfarlane GJ, Nielsen CS. Defining chronic pain in epidemiological studies - a systematic review and meta-analysis. Pain; in press.

The study team on MAmMOTH celebrate reaching the study recruitment target!

Some of the clinical investigators on the FOMAxS study – investigating management of fibromyalgia when it occurs as a comorbidity to axial spondyloarthritis – gathered in Aberdeen to make final preparations before data collection began.
We welcomed Stephen Simpson, Director of Research at Arthritis Research UK to visit the Aberdeen Centre for Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Health in August 2017.
Staff and Postdoctoral Students List 2018

Academic Staff

Professor Gary J Macfarlane *Chair (Clinical) in Epidemiology and Head of Group*
Dr Gareth T Jones *Reader of Epidemiology and Deputy Head of Group*
Dr Neil Basu *Clinical Senior Lecturer in Rheumatology*
Dr Rosemary Hollick *Clinical Senior Lecturer in Rheumatology*
Dr Kathryn R Martin *Lecturer in Epidemiology*

Research Staff

Dr Joanna Shim *Research Fellow*
Dr. Daniel Whibley, *Research Fellow*
Dr. Linda Dean, *Research Assistant*
Mr. Ross MacDonald, *Research Assistant*
Ms Gillian Smith, *Research Assistant*
Dr. Santosh Ghaire, *Research Assistant*

Academic-related staff

Mr Marcus Beasley *Study Co-ordinator (MAmMOTH study)*
Dr. Karen Forrest Keenan *Study Co-ordinator (DyNAMISM Study)*
Dr Claudia Zabke *Study Co-ordinator (BSRBR-AS)*
Dr Elizabeth A Jones *Study Co-ordinator (FOMAxS)*
Ms Zoe Henderson, *Study Co-ordinator (Walk with Ease)*
Ms. Maureen Brady, *Assistant Study Co-ordinator (BSRBR-PsA)*
Ms Jane Brady, *Assistant Study Co-ordinator (BSRBR-PsA)*
Mr Adam Fletcher *Project Assistant*
Mr Barry Morris *Project Assistant*
Ms Michelle Cloude *Project Assistant*
Mr Giles O’Donovan *Group Secretary*

Post-graduate research students

Miss Shifa Sarica *PhD Student*
Ms Kinga Janik-Koncewicz *PhD student*
Ms Hadeel Abbood *PhD student*
Ms LaKrista Morton *PhD student*
Mr Ross MacDonald, *PhD student*
Ms Stefanie Döbl, *PhD student*
Visiting staff and students

Dr. Bhadra Mallawaarachchi *Visiting Research Fellow (Institute of Postgraduate Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka)*
Ms Laura Bruno *Visiting Intern (University of Bremen)*
Ms Rieke Baumkötter *Visiting Intern (University of Bremen)*

**Honorary Staff**

Dr. Tatiana Macfarlane *Honorary Reader*
Dr Fabiola Atzeni *Honorary Senior Research Fellow*
Dr Gabriele Simonini *Honorary Senior Research Fellow*
Dr Jan Sznajd - *Honorary Clinical Senior Lecturer*