

MACP education award September 2016

I completed the Designing Clinical Research course at Kings Health Partners/University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) over three months. The course aims to help health professionals design clinical research and produce their own research proposal ready for a funding application. The participants were mostly registrars with a few pharmacists and nurses. I was the only Physiotherapist and this diversity was really interesting and inspiring. Significant numbers of the other participants were already academic fellows embedded into a research teams and although this did not feel like a level playing field during the competition at the end, it was fascinating to see the breadth of the projects and the research environment that others were working in.

The course was designed into eight week sections each covering an aspect of building a research project. There was roughly six hours of online learning from UCSF and then work to prepare your own research project in time for the weekly mentoring meeting one evening. The course was split into two groups of about 10-12 each with their own faculty members who were either statisticians or clinical academics. Each week the other participants or faculty challenged your thoughts and assumptions on the week's work which was invaluable.

My area of interest was evaluating the effect of an education group for people with episodic migraine through a randomised controlled trial. The initial topics covered were the research question and significance along with subjects / variables and it was surprising how difficult it was to get the research question and subject choice right despite coming to the course knowing my area of work well. The course then continued through study design, enhancing causal inference, sample size and power. My MSc was many years ago and it took some revision and reading to be able to produce a feasible result. The final weeks were taken up with questionnaires, data monitoring, statistics and ethics all of which were very interesting and will be useful in future.

Finally there was a competition element to the course where we presented our work to our own group and two students were selected to go through to the final, judged by three NIHR professors. I was delighted to be selected to be one of the four finalists and presented my proposal to the whole course and judging Professors. The feedback was very encouraging and although I did not win the overall prize my work was commented on by faculty members as likely to get a grant which was very encouraging.

I chose the course because it was going to help bridge the gap between clinical work and research that I was struggling to see my way through. Due to clinical commitments I needed a course that was able to sit alongside my day job and so the combination of online learning with an evening mentoring group worked really well. I was delighted to have got to the final as a Physiotherapist and with a topic that I had written from the concept to the proposal. I am very grateful to the MACP for their support.

Anne-Marie Logan