Welcome to the Winter 2014 edition of HEUnews!

As we prepare for the traditional seasonal festivities, the featured research articles in this issue echo the festive spirit of thinking of others. The EconEndLife team have been exploring the views of decision makers and the public about the importance of incorporating outcomes experienced by individuals close to the patient in decision making; while work led by Emma Frew and Ilias Goranitis explore a wider evaluative space and the role of Social Behaviour and Network Therapy (SBNT) which involves close friends and family as part of the treatment process, when considering treatments for drug misuse.

In this issue, we focus primarily on capacity building at various stages. We are delighted to have been successful with two new PhD studentships, whilst welcoming three PhD students, Magda, Arjun and Chidubem who were appointed to HEUs three existing successful studentships from the last round. We are also delighted to welcome 28 new students to HEUs MSc Programmes, including three NIHR funded students to the Unit’s new MSc Health Economics and Econometrics running for the first time this academic year. To complete the festive mood, we are pleased to congratulate all our students celebrating their graduations in December (photograph on back page). Enjoy the seasonal celebrations & Happy New Year!

Tracy Roberts
Head of Unit

What’s new in HEU...

Research studentship success.

Researchers within HEU have successfully teamed up with other members of the School for Health and Population Sciences to win doctoral studentships.

Joanna Coast, along with Fiona Irvine and Cara Bailey from Nursing, has been successful in securing a 3 year PhD research studentship for a student to investigate capabilities at end of life for people experiencing different trajectories towards death and associated different forms of care. The studentship will be linked with work on economic evaluation at end of life which has developed a new tool - the ICECAP-SCM - for assessing the opportunity for a good death. Applications for the studentship will be advertised shortly.

Tracy Roberts led an application for a joint Melbourne-Birmingham U21 PhD studentship. The studentship will explore ways to quantify the potential harms associated with over-diagnosis in breast cancer screening, specifically Ductal Carcinoma in Situ (DCIS) and specifically include these harms (Disutilities) in cost effectiveness models. Co supervisors include UoB colleague Miss Adele Francis (a breast cancer surgeon) from Cancer Sciences, and Professor Bruce Mann and Dr Dennis Petrie, a breast surgeon and health economist respectively from the University of Melbourne.
Exploring the views of policy-makers and the public on decision-making in the context of end of life care

The EconEndLife team have been busy conducting focus groups across the West Midlands region with members of the general public and policy-makers involved in end of life care decision-making. This is the final phase of data collection for the EconEndLife Programme which aims to explore the measurement of end of life care for use in economic evaluation.

Members of the general public were recruited to take part in focus groups across five locations, during summer 2014. Despite coinciding with a mini ‘heat wave’, 38 participants valued attributes from the newly developed ICECAP-CPM (close person measure), developed by Alastair Canaway as part of his PhD. Participants also considered the relative importance of outcomes experienced by patients versus close persons in the context of end of life care, using a budget pie approach. Finally, participants considered various decision-rules for resource allocation.

Amartya Sen has suggested that values in a capability framework should be arrived at through discussion and deliberation; hence facilitating discussion was a key objective within the groups as well as capturing the impact of discussion on individual views. Early results indicate strong public support for taking into account outcomes experienced by those close to the patient. Follow-up interviews revealed that participants had a positive and interesting experience, despite the chocolate biscuits melting in the heat!

The first focus group with local policy-makers was conducted in November, with a stronger focus on decision-making/resource allocation, but still with an emphasis on deliberation. Additional focus groups with local and national policy-makers will be conducted in the new year (with more optimal chocolate biscuit temperatures).

The EconEndLife team are: Jo Coast (PI), Cara Bailey (Senior Lecturer), Alastair Canaway (PhD student) and Phil Kinghorn (Research Fellow).

For an overview of the EconEndLife project see: www.birmingham.ac.uk/ICECAP

Cost-effectiveness of Social Behaviour and Network Therapy (SBNT) for Heroin Users: Broadening the Evaluative Space

Drug misuse is a major problem in the UK with more than 380,000 individuals being addicted to opiates. The implications of this problem are wide and extend beyond the individual, to the physical and mental health of user’s family and friends, and to the safety of society. Drug misuse is also a significant drain on public resources with an estimated annual societal cost of £15 billion.

Evidence suggests that social networks are central to the resolution of addictive behaviour, but existing treatment pathways remain individually focused. Social Behaviour and Network Therapy (SBNT) involves close friends and family as part of the treatment process, and has been shown to be effective when targeted at alcohol problems. SBNT has since been adapted for use with primary opiate users and a pilot trial, funded by the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme, was conducted to explore the cost-effectiveness of SBNT for both opiate users, and their social network members.

Emma Frew and Ilias Goranitis are exploring the impact of broadening the evaluative space when measuring the cost-effectiveness of SBNT. Within the trial, resource use has been measured from a societal perspective using the Client Service Receipt Inventory, and outcomes measured using both the EQ-5D and the ICECAP measure. Their analysis aims to contribute to the treatment policy for drug misuse, as well as to the discussion around the importance and methodological challenges of broadening the evaluative space within economic evaluations. Their work will be discussed in the upcoming Health Economists’ Study Group January 2015 meeting, hosted by the University of Leeds.
Have you heard...

...about the contribution that HEU makes to research funding decision making?

Whilst members of HEU are fully engaged in research and teaching, they also undertake a number of citizenship activities. Given the nature of work undertaken within the Unit, Staff expertise is particularly suited to the various NHIR panels, both at regional and national level, and focusing on both research and career development. Staff members are currently serving on the NIHR Programme Grants for Applied Research Committee (Tracy Roberts), the West Midlands Research for Patient Benefit Committee (Sue Jowett) and the NIHR Doctoral Research Fellowship Panel (Emma Frew). There are also contributions to charitable funders’ panels, including the Marie Curie Cancer Care Research Funding Committee (Joanna Coast) and the Cancer Research UK Early Diagnosis Advisory Group (Joanna Coast), and to more ad hoc research funding activities including reviews of existing support (Tracy Roberts, Welsh Health Economics Support Service) and, in the last couple of years, international funding activities (Emma Frew, Health Research Board in Ireland; Joanna Coast, Quality of Life and Health Board, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). All of these activities, whilst clearly being of benefit to the research funders involved, are also hugely valuable for HEU staff in terms of exposure to the requirements of funding panels, meeting other colleagues and contributing to the general research environment in the UK – although the amount of reading involved can, of course, often be challenging!

HEU welcomes António Teixeira Rodrigues who is visiting HEU for six months on the Erasmus Internship programme. António is a PhD Student in Epidemiology and Public Health at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, where he is conducting research on the issue of antimicrobial resistance, a major public health problem. António’s PhD is on Improving antibiotic use throughout a multidisciplinary intervention: a cluster-randomized controlled trial, and during his visit he aims to perform an economic evaluation alongside this randomized controlled trial to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the multidisciplinary intervention. He is also thinking about methods for modelling the long term effects of the intervention on antibiotic effectiveness and on antimicrobial resistance rates, as well as working on some of the datasets available in HEU.

HEU welcomes new doctoral students Magda Aguiar, Arjun Bhadhuri and Chidubem Ogwulu Chriscasimir, who have all recently completed their MSc. Magda will be exploring treatment and prevention strategies for vitamin D deficiency supervised by Emma Frew, Lazaros Andronis, Miranda Pallan (public health) and Wolfgang Hogler (paediatrician). Magda’s PhD work will model the cost-effectiveness of different strategies within a paediatric population from a global perspective.

Arjun will be working on his project on health spillovers and will be supervised by Hareth Al-Janabi, Sue Jowett and Kate Jolly (public health). Arjun’s PhD work will examine methods for including spillover effects in economic evaluation, focusing on case studies of childhood illness and adult respiratory illness.

Chidubem will be supervised by Tracy Roberts, Louise Jackson and Phil Kinghorn and will develop and pilot approaches for the valuation of outcomes associated with sexually transmitted infections.

Welcome back to Alastair Canaway who has been working towards a PhD on the EconEndLife programme for the past three years. He will be re-joining the HEU as a research fellow working with Dr Emma Frew on the WAVES obesity prevention trial. The trial is being conducted across the West Midlands and aims to prevent weight gain in children aged 6-7 years by increasing physical activity and promoting healthy eating by working with schools and communities. The trial has been ongoing for the past three years and Alastair’s work will focus on conducting the economic evaluation of the trial to determine its cost-effectiveness.
Capacity building news

From the start of this academic year, we are pleased to introduce 2 new members to the Health Economics Teaching Team. Dr Louise Jackson has taken on the role of Deputy Director of Teaching and Dr Ilia Goranitis as Assistant Deputy Director of Teaching. Louise and Ilia will work alongside the Director of Teaching Dr Pelham Barton.

Louise and Ilia are enjoying their new roles and have been busy welcoming new students onto our existing MSc in Health Economics and Health Policy and our new MSc in Health Economics and Econometrics.

MSc Programmes and associated short courses

HEU runs two separate but allied MSc programmes: MSc Health Economics and Health Policy and MSc Health Economics and Econometrics. Both MSc programmes are ideal for new graduates hoping to pursue a career in health economics. The MSc in Health Economics and Health Policy is also particularly suited to those currently working in the health care sector who wish to develop skills in health economics. Both programmes explore the key principles and theories upon which health economics is based as well as developing practical skills for the conduct of empirical work. The MSc Health Economics and Econometrics is differentiated primarily by its compulsory modules in Microeconomics and Econometrics in addition to the health economics modules and requires a first degree in Economics. The following modules are shared by both programmes and are also provided as individual short courses:

- Introduction to Health Economics;
- Policy and Economics of Health Care Delivery (optional for MSc Health Economics and Econometrics);
- Economic Evaluation in Health Care;
- Modelling for Health Economics.

To learn more about the MSc's or about the short courses visit: http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/healtheconomics, contact Helen Evans on 0121 414 7694 or email healeconomics@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Selected recent publications