Welcome to the Summer 2015 edition of HEUnews!

With the arrival of the UK’s traditional summer weather, many colleagues have made a lucky escape to iHEA in Milan. Hareth Al-Janabi and Jo Coast are each leading an organised session with contributions from a number of other HEU colleagues, and Emma Frew is delivering the pre-conference workshop on technology and teaching (see below). Back in the UK, the Government’s recent July Budget has delivered a raft of welfare and tax credit changes that may impact on the blood pressure of those detrimentally affected; the two featured research items in this issue focus on benefit changes and blood pressure respectively. Hareth Al-Janabi and Professor Fiona Carmichael from Birmingham Business school are collaborating to explore the impact of disability benefit changes across family units to raise understanding of the impact social security policy changes have on those living with long term health conditions. Meanwhile undetected hypertension is the focus of research involving Pelham Barton, Sue Jowett and Mark Monahan who, with colleagues at the University of Oxford, are exploring blood pressure self-monitoring and its effectiveness in both detecting and treating hypertension (see inside).

In staff news we report Hugh McLeod’s six month secondment at Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and are very pleased to welcome two new colleagues Tosin Lambe and Bishal Mohindru who both graduated from HEU’s MSc programme in 2014. Finally we report the introduction of ‘Student Focus’ as a regular newsletter slot I wonder?). In this issue, Student Focus presents a profile of another recent HEU MSc Graduate, Joanna Thorn – now a health economics researcher at Bristol University – who explains how the MSc has helped her career and reflects on the fun experienced on the modelling module (Could that be anything to do with anecdotes delivered by a certain staff member who also has a regular newsletter slot I wonder?). Anyhow – I hope we will all get some fun in the sun soon too!

Tracy Roberts
Head of Unit

What’s new in HEU...

HEU staff and students have been active in conferences over the last few months. In March, Alastair Canaway gave a plenary presentation at the Marie Curie annual research conference held at the Royal Society of Medicine. The presentation covered Alastair’s doctoral work within the context of the EconEndLife programme, and was extremely well received. More information about Alastair’s work can be found here http://blog.mariecurie.org.uk/2015/03/19/research-economics-alastair-canaway/

Members of HEU have also been presenting at two key health economics conferences this summer, with papers both at the Lancaster HESG and iHEA in Milan. At HESG, various aspects of work using the ICECAP measures was presented, with a paper led by Ilias Goranitis & Emma Frew on the validity of the measure in the context of drug addiction, another led by Paul Mitchell (Kings & ex-HEU) and colleagues including Jo Coast, on using health measures to predict capability, and a theoretical paper questioning the value of a life-course approach to capability measurement by Jo. At iHEA, there are two organised sessions led by HEU. The first is led by Hareth Al-Janabi on ‘Including family spillovers in economic evaluation’, and includes presentations of Hareth’s own work (on predicting family carers’ health outcomes from patient data). The second is led by Jo Coast on ‘Using Innovative Qualitative Methods to Achieve Novel Aims in Health Economics’ and includes papers by Sam Husbands (on using observation to explore processes for decision analytic modelling), Alastair Canaway (on using hierarchical modelling to explore who should be included in evaluations of end of life care) and Phil Kinghorn (on using deliberative approaches to explore values for end of life care) as well as Jo (on analysing qualitative data through an economic lens). Emma Frew is also giving a pre-conference iHEA workshop on the use of technology to enhance health economics teaching as well as an individual presentation exploring different evaluative spaces in health economics using the ICECAP.

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Hareth Al-Janabi is part of a team, led by Prof Fiona Carmichael (University of Birmingham Business School), that is investigating the impact of disability benefit changes across family units. The team will work with a PhD student (Caitlin McMullin) to explore long-term experiences of families where one or more family members receives, has recently received, or has applied for Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments.

There have been some recent changes for disabled people and people with long term health conditions in access to social security in the UK. These changes reflect a wider international policy agenda associated with economic austerity and the contraction of state support. In particular, in the UK, Disability Living Allowance for adults aged 16-64 is being replaced by Personal Independence Payments. The team want to explore how these kinds of policy changes affect people’s lives, their employment, their health and their wellbeing over the long-term.

The research will involve interviews with people who have applied for Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment and interviews with their informal carers, other family members, or close friends. In the interviews the team will ask about experiences of social security entitlements as well as how this interacts with their day-to-day life (including leisure, work and wellbeing). As part of the research the research team will be asking participants to complete an embedded life-history calendar to contextualise the interview findings.

The team are hoping the research will raise understanding of how social security policy changes affect people with long term health conditions and their families.

The project is funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust and will run from February 2015 to January 2017.

Optimising the diagnosis and management of hypertension in primary care through self monitoring of blood pressure

Hypertension (high blood pressure (BP)) is a major risk factor for stroke and heart disease, with almost 7 million people in England currently receiving antihypertensive treatment. However, research suggests that perhaps twice as many people have undetected hypertension and, for many of those being treated, it is poorly controlled. BP can be easily and accurately measured using electronic BP monitors and evidence suggests that patients can successfully self-monitor using this equipment. An Oxford University-led NIHR Programme Grant, which began in early 2012, aims to provide new information regarding the use of self-monitoring of BP in both the detection and treatment of hypertension. The research is led by Professor Richard McManus and builds on three self-monitoring trials (TASMINH, TASMINH 2, TASMIN-SR), and a model-based analysis which determined the most appropriate method for diagnosing hypertension, that subsequently informed NICE hypertension guidelines. All four studies involved members of HEU as collaborators.

Continuing this successful collaboration, the health economics aspects of the current programme are led by Sue Jowett and Pelham Barton, with Mark Monahan employed on this study for the next two years. Decision modelling is being used to explore four main research questions:

- Is the use of a risk-based algorithm to determine who receives home BP monitoring/ambulatory BP monitoring cost-effective? This work builds on the analysis undertaken for the NICE guidelines.
- Could the use of blood pressure self-screening kiosks in the community be a cost effective method of screening for hypertension?
- What is the most cost-effective method of hypertension screening and subsequent cardiovascular risk assessment?
- Is the management of hypertension based on self-monitored blood pressure, with or without telemonitoring, cost-effective compared to usual care? Here the modelling will extrapolate the results of the TASMIN 4 trial.

It is hoped that the results of this research will influence guidelines produced by NICE and be followed by GPs nationally. Ultimately, the purpose is to result in better management of hypertension and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
The HEU would like to give a warm welcome to two new members of staff, Tosin Lambe and Bishal Mohindru, who both completed their MSc in Health Economics & Health Policy in 2014. Tosin will firstly be working with Sue Jowett modelling the cost-effectiveness of treatment for COPD in the BLISS study, he will then be working with Emma Frew on a trial-based economic evaluation in children with nephrotic syndrome, the PREDNS trial. Tosin has a clinical background and completed his MSc in Health Economics & Health Policy at the HEU in 2013. Bishal will be working with Tracy Roberts measuring the cost-effectiveness of treatment for scabies and undertaking long-term decision analytic modelling to extrapolate costs and effects.

Hugh McLeod started a six-month secondment at Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group in May. Hugh is developing a strategy for using outcome-based measures across the CCG. As part of this work, Hugh is looking at the possibility of the adoption of the ICECAP capability approach to measuring quality of life at both a strategic level and across a range of initiatives intended to strengthen the delivery of health and social care services to vulnerable individuals. For example, with a focus on older people, the ICECAP-O measure has considerable potential to provide a clear focus for both developing service innovation and quantifying impact on quality of life in Gloucestershire.

Jo Coast was extremely fortunate to be invited to visit Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan in March. She was taking part in a funded programme to explore capability measurement in health, and was hosted by Professor Reiko Gotoh, a well-known economist working in the capability approach. Jo presented a paper exploring the development of the ICECAP measures and the possibilities for a future ICECAP measure for children, as well as contributing to work on the development of a Japanese translation of ICECAP-O. She also found a little time to see some of the sights in Tokyo!
We are delighted to congratulate Alastair Canaway on his PhD success. Alastair successfully defended his PhD thesis, “Capturing the impacts of end of life care on those close to the dying for use in economic evaluation”. There were three key components to Alastair’s thesis: (i) developing a measure through qualitative interviews to capture the impact of end of life care on those close to the dying, (ii) valuing the measure using a novel approach known as ‘deliberative valuation’, and (iii) using hierarchical mapping to investigate the networks around those at end of life. Alastair was supervised by Joanna Coast, Hareth Al-Janabi, Phil Kinghorn and Cara Bailey. The research is part of the EconEndLife programme funded by the European Research Council.

We are pleased that HEU will again be involved in the European Health Economics Association (EuHEA) student-supervisor conference. Following last year’s successful conference at the University of Manchester, this year’s conference is at Paris-Dauphine University between 2nd and 4th September. The conference offers a unique opportunity for PhD students to present work in progress, gain feedback from supervisors and peers, and network with students from across Europe. Students with papers are allocated one hour for presentation and discussion led by another student’s supervisor.

This year, two of our first year students, Arjun Bhadhuri and Magda Aguiar, will be presenting their work. Arjun, supervised by Hareth Al-Janabi, Sue Jowett and Kate Jolly, will be presenting on the validity of preference-based health measures for family carers. Magda, supervised by Emma Frew, Lazaros Andronis, Miranda Pallan and Wolfgang Höglér, will be presenting on the cost effectiveness of strategies to prevent population vitamin D deficiency. Emma Frew will also be attending as our supervisor/staff representative. We hope that they all find the conference stimulating and useful (and of course enjoy Paris).

He is the second-year student at the Health Economics Unit for six weeks this summer. Louise Windmill, an Economics student at the University of Birmingham was the successful applicant from a strong field of second year undergraduate students. The aim of the NIHR Research Methods Internship is to stimulate interest in health economics and attract the brightest students into a career in health economics. With a focus on the health economics of medical tests, Louise will gain experience in economic modelling, systematic reviewing and data analysis.

STUDENT FOCUS

Joanna Thorn BSc PhD MSc

Q: When did you study on the MSc in Health Economics and Health Policy?
A: I started the course on a part-time basis in 2009, and graduated in 2012.

Q: What were you doing before you took the course?
A: My background is in physical sciences (I have a chemistry PhD) - I was working for a physics journal publisher in various editorial and IT roles. Completely different!

Q: Why did you choose this course?
A: I have a very good friend who is a health economist - the work she was doing always seemed much more interesting than my own work! The choice of Birmingham was pragmatic - the week-long modular arrangements meant that it was straightforward to attend whilst working and living in Bristol.

Q: What did you enjoy most about the MSc?
A: I loved being introduced to new ideas - by the end of the first morning, I knew that I’d made the right choice. The modelling module was fun, and I met some great people!

Q: What was the greatest challenge for you when you were doing the MSc?
A: Fitting the assignments in whilst working part-time and looking after children - I did a lot of work at 6am!

Q: What was your dissertation topic?
A: I did a systematic review of the ways in which authors interpret expected value of perfect information (EVPI) values. So I looked at whether authors are more likely to recommend that further research is carried out on a topic if they found a high EVPI value.

Q: Did you present your dissertation findings or publish them?
A: I presented the work at the Health Economists Study Group meeting in Oxford (very useful forum for getting feedback!). The work has just been published in the Journal Medical Decision Making.

Q: What have you gone on to do since finishing the course?
A: I presented the work at the Health Economists Study Group meeting in 2010, in a role that combined applied economic evaluation alongside RCTs with methodology work. It’s a fantastic work environment, and I have been encouraged to develop my own research interests.

Q: What did you do four or five years from now?
A: I hope I will have contributed some tangible improvements to costing methodology, and I’m aiming to be able to apply for a lectureship.

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