

Study update, March 2023

The link worker role in primary care

Welcome to the spring edition of our update. Like the crocuses and daffodils making an appearance after the winter, and the blossoming trees, our analysis is starting to take shape and bloom.



The study, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), is led by Stephanie Tierney and Kamal Mahtani, both of whom work at the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford. It is focusing data collection around link workers based in seven different parts of the country (study sites).

Where are we in progressing the research?

Data collection update

We are in the process of conducting follow up interviews with patients we talked to about 12 months ago as part of the study's first work package. In these follow up interviews, we ask patients about how they feel they benefited (or not) from seeing a link worker and how they would describe their current situation. Furthermore, we ask them if they used any of the services, groups or other support suggested by the link worker. We are also talking to the link workers again who were part of our first work package.

Analysis team meeting

We have monthly analysis meetings as a research team. These meetings are online and allow us to think about and discuss data as we are collecting it. In Dec 2022 and Feb 2023, we had in-person analysis meetings. At these meetings we discussed key ideas coming from the data. We talked about how we were managing and 'coding' the data we have collected to help us make sense of it. As part of this, we drew some diagrams that illustrated our understanding of the topic, including ideas about boundaries (or their absence) around the link worker role in primary care. We are now planning our first journal articles from the study.

Patient-public involvement (PPI) meeting

Our PPI group continues to be a great source of support as we progress the study. In Feb 2023 we met with this group in person at Kellogg College in Oxford. We were joined, at the request of the group, by three link workers. This gave our PPI group the opportunity to ask the link workers about their role. During the meeting, all present were invited to comment on emerging ideas coming from our analysis of the data around how much discretion link workers have in their job, and the consequences of this. We received very positive feedback from those who attended the meeting about how much they enjoyed the discussions and activities we organised for them. The following photograph was taken at this meeting.



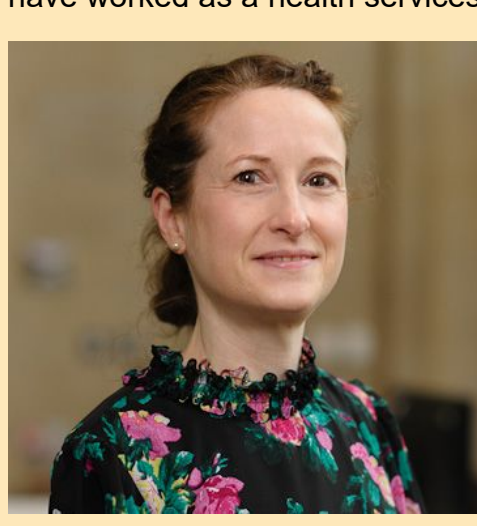
Publications and blogs

Here are some recent publications written by members of the team that might be of interest:

- Jordan Gorenberg, Stephanie Tierney et al. (2023) Understanding and improving older people's well-being through social prescribing involving the cultural sector: Interviews from a realist evaluation. [Journal of Applied Gerontology](#).
- Stephanie Tierney - [Counting GP appointments when evaluating social prescribing: Does a reduction necessarily signal success?](#)
- Stephanie Tierney - [Community cohesion to develop social capital: A means of addressing health and well-being](#)
- Steven Markham - [How we make sense of data](#)
- Debra Westlake and Stephanie Tierney - [At your discretion: Public and link worker reflections on our emerging findings](#)

Meet a member of the research team: Stephanie Tierney

I am one of the people leading this study on the link worker role in primary care. I have worked as a health services researcher for almost 20 years.



I am one of the people leading this study on the link worker role in primary care.

I have worked as a health services researcher for almost 20 years. I have been involved in a number of different projects, which have focused on people's broader well-being when faced with challenges due to ill health. For the past five years, my research has centred on social prescribing.

Outside of work, I have always been a keen dancer. When I was young, I went to ballet and tap classes (from the age of three). After a break when I went to university, I started dancing again as an adult. It is a great way to keep fit but also is a workout for my brain. It is a wonderful way to make friends and feel part of a community with people who have a shared interest. I have lived in several different parts of England and finding dance classes to attend has been key to helping me feel like I belong in a new area.



Get in touch

If you would like any more information about this research on the link worker role, please see our project page or do not hesitate to contact the study leads:

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