Paediatric dentist wins award for her outstanding leadership in research

NIHR (National Institute for Health Research) Doctoral Research Fellow and Honorary Specialty Registrar Helen Rogers has won BSPD’s Outstanding Innovation Award (OIA) for her work in establishing the trainee-led research group CONNECT. The group has existed for only 18 months but has already made a valuable contribution to the Specialty of Paediatric Dentistry through initiating multi-centre research studies and providing formal research training events.

CONNECT, the Child Oral health NortherN rEsarch CollaboraTive, is a membership organisation for trainees who have an interest in child oral health research. The group has representation in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield and is now reaching out to the rest of the UK.

BSPD President, Liz Roebuck, commented: “CONNECT trainees have invigorated and strengthened research among trainees into issues relating to children’s oral health. This will undoubtedly benefit our patients in the long term. Helen is to be congratulated on her leadership.”

As an NIHR fellow, Helen has gained hands-on research experience and has been able to access numerous research training courses, though she is aware that many of her trainee peers have not had the same opportunities. Her mission was to create a more level playing field to support trainees based in less research-active units. She also wanted to enhance the quality of research by promoting collaboration at trainee level between different academic centres.

CONNECT was launched at BSPD’s conference in Manchester in 2017 with 20 trainees from across the North of England, supported by their senior colleagues,
including Professor Zoe Marshman, a prominent BSPD member at the University of Sheffield. At last year’s conference the group organised two training events and the team have exciting plans for two similar events to be held at the BSPD conference in Birmingham this year.

Helen paid tribute to her founding colleagues, including Fiona Noble, Greig Taylor and Lucy Brown, alongside members of the wider committee and all the BSPD trainees who came to the first meeting. “I could not have done it without them.” She also expressed her gratitude to senior academic colleagues who have supported CONNECT from the start.

With some 50 members on board already, the group focuses on supporting and encouraging trainees to get involved in research. The team also organise regular research training events which are open to anyone with an interest in child oral health research.

Helen said: “I am thrilled with the award and hope it will help our group go from strength to strength and encourage others to get established too.”

“Regardless of whether our members go on to pursue a career in academia, or not, CONNECT hopes to provide the specialists and consultants of the future with a strong grounding in research.”

Her prize for winning the OIA, now in its third year, is the opportunity to give a presentation at the BSPD conference. Previous winners are Ingrid Perry, a founder of the Teeth Team project and Ben Underwood, creator of BrushDJ.

**Note to editors**

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