

# **Understanding presentations and admissions to hospital towards the end of life for people with frailty – project specification**

## **ESRC Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) collaborative doctoral studentship with Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

Information about the collaborative PhD project: This studentship has been devised in collaboration between Dr Erica Borgstrom (Open University) and Dr Richard Venn and Dr Luke Hodgson from Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Project context and initial project ideas are outlined below. Applicants for the studentship are encouraged to use these as a springboard for their own proposals and are expected to have a proposal with refined research questions, methods, and potential impacts.

### Context

On average, people have 2-3 emergency hospital admissions in the last year of life. Data from Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust suggests that over 50% of patients over 75 years old with a high frailty score have three or more hospital admissions in their last year of life. Such admissions can result in lengthy hospital stays and 64% of this patient population die during a hospital admission. The local data suggests that this patient group frequently presents to hospital via the Emergency Department (ED), even if not admitted (e.g. over 60% have 4 or more ED visits in the last year of life). Both scenarios – presentation to ED and hospital admission – involve considerable diagnostic testing and, potentially, treatment. Previous research has questioned the ‘appropriateness’ of hospital admissions and treatment burden near the end of life. However, little is understood about this patient group’s pathways to and from the hospital, the contributing factors for admission and their experiences of their care during this time.

**Aims:** Building on existing local retrospective data about presentations and admissions for patients with frailty within the last year of life, this project will use an ethnographic approach to explore patient pathways to/from hospital and experiences of care during these times. The findings from this research will be used to inform clinical service improvements.

### Examples of Potential Research Questions

- What does the process of presenting to ED when a person is frail and possibly in the last year of life look like?
- What are people’s experiences and expectations of patients with frailty presenting at ED? How might this relate to their overall care, particularly towards the end of life?
- What are the reasons that people in this patient group are presenting and/or being admitted to hospital? What factors are mitigating or facilitating this?

### Example of Potential Project Design and Methods

The overall project will involve an ethnographic approach focusing on one patient group (patients with frailty presenting at ED who could be in their last year of life) within one hospital (Worthing). For context, the student will familiarise themselves with: existing literature about hospital admissions and existing retrospective data and insights into patterns of presentations/admissions. Original data collection will focus on 10 patients with a high frailty score who have presented to ED. These patients will be prospectively selected and 'followed' for up to a year (as anticipated to be in their last year of life). Methods will involve interviewing patients, and where appropriate others (i.e. carers/family, care home, and/or hospital staff) about their care, analysing their patient notes and observing their care whilst in hospital. Further ethnographic observations and interviews will more generally capture ED and hospital culture to understand how this patient group is assessed and treated. Analysis will be informed by the use of social theory. For research ethics, the project will require HREC and CAG approvals in addition to university and local hospital approvals.

Applicants are expected to provide a proposal that is 2,000 words maximum. They may use the background information in this example to inform their proposal. The proposal must contain refined research questions, methods and potential impacts. Applicants are advised to ensure that proposed methods fit their research questions.