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INSTITUTE NEWS

Institute of Population Health Bulletin

Welcome to the latest edition of the IPH weekly bulletin. We hope that you're finding these updates helpful and starting next Monday, we will also launch a separate weekly update highlighting upcoming events and research opportunities.

Blogs from institute colleagues



Blog post by Jignasa Mehta - Lecturer in School of Health Sciences, Orthoptics programme

As an orthoptist, it was obvious to me that vision was an important element for maintaining balance. Yet, vision was often overlooked in the falls assessment and very little was known about the impact of having a sight condition on the fear of falling. This led me to apply for a research training fellowship offered by the Dunhill Medical Trust with a project combining clinical and qualitative research to determine the impact of vision on falls and fear of falling, an issue of great public health significance.

During my fellowship, I was able to utilise and consolidate the skills I had as a clinician and also learn new knowledge and techniques to navigate the field of social science research. The fellowship and my research has led to many opportunities to further develop my career, for example I was appointed the Public Health Lead for the British and Irish Orthoptic Society. I have had the opportunity to influence clinical practice when I was invited to speak at an NHS Improvement conference on falls and also when I delivered a 'Vision and falls' workshop at a conference hosted by the British Gerontology Society (2018, Leeds). I am also a member of the Cheshire and Merseyside Falls Prevention Group building academic links with our local strategic health partners.

My research has allowed me to conclude that impaired depth perception and contrast sensitivity are key clinical risk factors in falls. Managing falls risk and fear is related to resilience, underpinned by individual, social and environmental resources. Older adults

living in the most deprived areas of Liverpool were found to be at greater risk of having a fall and poor environments (poor pavement and lighting) were most commonly cited by the participants as a risk for falls. These findings and that the older adults I interviewed were keen to have more information and knowledge about their condition to manage their falls risk, highlights the significance of social determinants of health and communication in healthcare. Therefore, the research from this study has health and social care impact in the way health care professionals need to consider the role of vision in how falls risk is managed and broader structural issues can impact on older adults to live well in their environments.

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