



TERMLY NEWSLETTER

MICHAELMAS TERM 2024



WELCOME

Krina Zondervan, Head of Department



As we approach the end of the year, I know you're all looking forward to a well-earned break! There have been many highlights this term that are worth mentioning. We were awarded an Athena SWAN Gold award (yes, we'll proudly repeat that a few more times!) for our ongoing efforts to support equality, diversity and inclusion.

We also introduced our first NDWRH Annual Report, which highlights a selection of the fantastic achievements across our department in research, education and professional services. The report also includes a reminder of our strategic aims for the coming years. It serves as a testament to the exceptional talent, dedication and innovation within our department, and I encourage you to explore it in full.

We have also celebrated many individual successes, including Angga Lokeswara receiving the Young Scientist Award, Angel Branker being named Apprentice of the Year, and (hot of the press) Tiff Lodge winning Apprentice Manager of the Year.

Research led by teams in our department has secured significant funding and made headlines (with the ovarian cancer vaccine study being a great example). This term, our publications have spanned a breadth of topics - from the impact of AI on healthcare, to the effect of placental extracellular vesicles on beta-cell function, symptom flares in chronic pelvic pain, and epigenetic markers for leukemia.

On the administrative front, we've introduced PeopleXD and are piloting the new PDR System to streamline processes and support staff. Our new wellbeing blog also offers valuable support and practical tips, including managing stress and finances during the holiday season.

Be sure to check out our "60 Seconds with" feature, where we highlight the work of Elizabeth Gan. If you'd like to be featured in a future edition of the newsletter, please reach out via the Communications request form on The Hub.

We remain committed to public engagement through impactful outreach, such as the "Unpacking Contraception" panel at the IF Oxford Festival and the recent feature of MSc student Emily Robinson on the Health Lit Podcast—two great examples of how we share our expertise beyond academia.

I'm really looking forward to 2025, as we have so much more in store. In the meantime, I wish you all a happy, healthy, and, above all, restful break.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Krina".

ANNUAL REPORT

We were pleased to introduce our first **NDWRH Annual Report** this term. From impactful research to awards, education accomplishments and clinical studies, this report showcases our fantastic achievements over the past year.

We regret that we weren't able to include everything- which is a true testament to the incredible talent, dedication, and innovation within our department.

"It's fantastic to see our first annual report, and the incredible contributions from each and every one of you! Thank you for all your hard work!"

A special thanks to Rob, as well as the Research Theme Coordinators and Leads, for the many hours that went in to producing the report."

Krina Zondervan

We're eager to get this report in front of as many external contacts as possible so if you'd like hard copies to distribute to your connections please email rob.phillips@wrh.ox.ac.uk



[Click here to download the PDF](#)
[Click here to view the flipbook](#)





ATHENA SWAN

NDWRH Achieve Athena Swan Gold for Gender Equality

The Nuffield Department of Women's & Reproductive Health was awarded the prestigious Athena Swan Gold Award this term in recognition of its ongoing commitment to gender equality and diversity.

This award, announced on 23 September 2024, follows a rigorous application process and highlights the department's dedication to fostering an inclusive work environment.

Since first receiving the Bronze Award in 2013, and the Silver Award in 2015, NDWRH has made significant strides in promoting equality through initiatives like its Leadership Framework, mental health support services, and a commitment to improving career progression for all staff.

[Read more](#)



AWARDS

WINNER! Angga Lokeswara award

In November, Angga Lokeswara (pictured right) won the Young Scientist Award at the 32nd World Congress on Contraversies in Obsetrics, Gynecology and Infertility in Libson, Portugal.



Winner! Angel Branker wins apprentice of the year

This term, the Royal Society of Biology awarded Angel Branker with the Apprentice of the Year award.

This was a national competition hosted at the Royal Geographical Society in South Kensington. We are delighted that Angel's hard work for the lab and her positive attitude towards the apprenticeship process has been recognised by such a prestigious Society.

Angel's manager, Tiff Lodge followed that up a month later by winning the Apprentice Manager of the Year Award!



WINNER! Veronica wins best poster award at the British Intrapartum Care Society

Veronica Blanco Gutierrez, a visiting researcher and PHD student from the University of Bristol, supervised by Prof. Antonia Georgieva, attended the British Intrapartum Care Society (BICS) conference in Edinburgh in November 2024 where she won the Best Poster award.

The project, *Bridging the Human-Machine Gap: Humanising CTG's with Global Majority Women's Voices* focused on how women, especially those from a Global Majority, experience a common monitoring process during labour. The goal is to build trust and open communication, promote informed decision-making, enhance professional training, and develop user-friendly technology. [Read more.](#)



Sally Galal passes her DPhil viva at the IRS!

Her thesis was entitled 'The clinical diagnosis and treatment of phospholipase C zeta deficiency and the development of a nanoparticle-mediated delivery method for sperm.'

Sally was supervised by Prof. Kevin Coward, Celine Jones and Prof. Helen Townley.

Dr. Nathalie Conrad invited to join the European Society of Cardiology's (ESC) Data Science Committee!

The Data Science Committee drives innovative approaches and strategies for high quality data science and evidence generation across ESC countries.

Their objective is to help reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases whilst overseeing the coordination of data collection activities, lead by the ESC for public research (eg. ESC Atlas and Burden of Disease) and CV risk modelling (Cardiovascular Risk Collaboration).



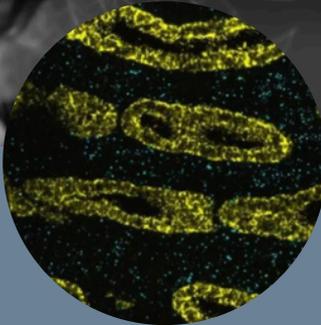
PUBLICATIONS

[Latest Publications](#)



Human Endometrial Map Uncovers Hidden Health Clues

Researchers from WRH, the [Wellcome Sanger Institute](#), and other collaborators have created the most comprehensive map of the human endometrium, the inner lining of the uterus. This map reveals diverse cell types and the dynamic changes they undergo during the menstrual cycle. It could help understand, and potentially treat conditions like endometriosis in the future. [Read more](#)



A Breakthrough in Early Epigenetic Markers for Leukemia

[Prof. Terry Dwyer](#) and 17 global partner institutions has revealed crucial molecular markers found in blood that are linked to the later development of leukemia.

This research could pave the way for earlier diagnosis and more effective therapeutic interventions for children's leukemia. The hope is, that with further validation, this study could lead to a new era of early cancer-detection, ultimately saving lives. [Read more](#)





Placental Extracellular Vesicles Enhance Beta-Cell Function

Recently published in **Clinical Science** this study, lead by **Faheem Seedat**, explores how placental small extracellular vesicles (sEVs) influence maternal beta-cell function. It provides crucial insights into the physiological adaptations of pregnancy and potential therapeutic pathways for diabetes.

By bridging the gap between placental biology and beta-cell physiology, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of pregnancy-related metabolic disorders and opens new avenues for clinical intervention.

[Read more](#)



Research Unveils High Prevalence of Symptom Flares in Women with Chronic Pelvic Pain

The translational Research in Pelvic Pain (**TRiPP**) surveyed 100 women diagnosed with various forms of Chronic Pelvic Pain. Over 60% of women reported that flares significantly disrupted their ability to carry out normal routines.

The study, led by **Dr. Lydia Coxon** and her colleagues, represents a critical advancement in understanding the triggers and variability of these episodes, with the goal of developing better strategies to help patients manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.

[Read more](#)



The impact of AI on Healthcare: Examining ChatGPT's Role

As published in **NPJ Women's Health**, our researchers assessed the accuracy and reliability of ChatGPT in obstetrics and gynecology.

Using over 1,500 questions from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' gold standard tests, the study revealed that ChatGPT's performance dropped from 70% (for more general medical questions) to 50% accuracy when clinical reasoning was required.

[Read more.](#)

GRANTS

Successful £150k grant application for Pancreatic research

Pancreatic Cancer UK will help fund a research project led by Prof. Townley and Prof. Swietach (pictured right) to investigate the use of lipid cubosome nanoparticles for targeted pancreatic cancer therapy. Hayley Parker will join the team as the PDRA, having gained her PhD at the University of Victoria, Canada.



Funding secured to develop ovarian cancer vaccine

Every year, around 7,500 people in the UK are diagnosed with ovarian cancer, with 4,100 deaths. Currently, there's no screening programme for the disease.

However, Prof. Ahmed and Dr. Zaarour (pictured left) have secured £600,000 of funding from Cancer Research UK over the next three years to test a potential preventative vaccine. The vaccine aims to teach the immune system to detect and attack early-stage ovarian cancer. [Read more.](#)

CLINICAL STUDIES

[Check out the CRG's new studies page](#)



PANDA DOSE Study: Advancing Maternal Health

Since March 2022, the Clinical Research Group (CRG) has been working on the PANDA DOSE study, part of a larger research programme focused on preventing maternal anaemia to reduce preterm births and other adverse outcomes. PANDA consists of five research streams aimed at improving the health of women and their babies by preventing anaemia during pregnancy through oral iron supplements.

The PANDA DOSE study has identified the optimal dose of iron to prevent anaemia, which will now be tested in the next phase of the research (PANDA Work Stream 3). Led by Professor Jane Hirst, the CRG will soon begin screening and recruiting participants for this important next step.

Oxford Study Seeks Pregnant Women for 3D Ultrasound Research

The PURE-FIRST study aims to build on our successful feasibility study by recruiting an additional 300 participant. Their goal is to explore the use of 3D ultrasound for capturing standardised 2D images of fetal structures between 11-14 weeks gestation.

Building on the success of an earlier feasibility study, this research aims to enhance diagnostic capabilities and enable earlier detection of fetal conditions, benefiting both expectant mothers and healthcare professionals.

Led by [Prof. Papageorgiou](#) and his team, the Clinical Research Group (CRG) is currently recruiting volunteers and collecting data for this important study.



RoADPain Study Featured in BBC Interview

[Prof. Katy Vincent](#) and [Dr. Lydia Coxon](#) were recently interviewed by the BBC to raise awareness about the RoADPain study. During the interview, they discussed the critical importance of addressing period pain seriously and highlighted the significance of their research. The study remains open for recruitment, and the team encourages participants to get involved.

[Read BBC article here](#) 

RoADPain Group Visits Oxfordshire Schools to Engage Young People

The Pain in Women research group is reaching out to Oxfordshire schools to engage young people in discussions about their ongoing RoADPain study. The group has already visited three primary schools, where they shared insights on scientific research and explored potential career paths in research.

This outreach is crucial for building awareness and trust in research, while also promoting the important work being done by the group.



Volunteers needed

We are scientists looking for volunteers with and without period pain for our study. We are looking for **young people aged 11-20**, who have **periods** and do not take hormone medication (such as the pill or mini pill) for any reason. We will use **questions, brain scans and tests of different body systems** (nerves, bladder and heart) to try to understand period pain.

email
roadpain@wrh.ox.ac.uk
for more information



RoADPain



UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Advert 4 v1.0 24.01.2024 IRAS: 315427

OUTREACH

Exploring Contraception at Oxford Science + Ideas Festival

On 15th October, [Dr. Neda Taghinejadi](#), [Dr. Pedro Melo](#) and [Chloe Curtis](#) took part in the "Unpacking Contraception" session at Oxford Science + Ideas Festival. It was a popular session where they addressed common questions about contraceptive research, including the development of modern contraceptives and the reliability of fertility apps.

UNPACKING CONTRACEPTION: THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF RESEARCH

When? 6:00pm on 15th October 2024

Where? James St. Tavern, 47-48 James Street, OX4 1EU

Come and join NDWRH'S own Neda, Chloe and Pedro at the Oxford Science+Ideas festival whilst they discuss gaps in contraception research, fertility apps, "male birth control" and more.

 BOOK NOW



MSc Student features on new podcast

In a recent episode of *Health Lit With Liv*, Emily Robertson, an MSc graduate from last year's Clinical Embryology course, shared her deep passion for the field of embryology and reflected on her academic journey. Emily spoke with both clarity and enthusiasm, offering insightful perspectives on her experiences throughout the course. Her reflections provided a valuable glimpse into the complexities of embryology, highlighting both the challenges and the rewards of this highly specialised field.

[Spotify link](#)
[Apple music link](#)





60 SECONDS WITH...

Elizabeth Gan

HTA and Collections Responsible Officer

1: Tell us about your role in the department.

I started in September as the HTA and collections responsible officer, working part-time (Monday to Wednesday). Prior to this role I was working in clinical biochemistry in the hospital while studying for my masters in biomedical science/blood science.

My role involves:

- *Monitoring & auditing collated collections under the HTA license 12217*
- *Helping with questions for WRH studies outside of the collection*
- *Monitoring & maintaining our department's iPassport platform*
- *Monitoring & maintaining the freezers*
- *Writing & maintaining SOP and RA's*
- *Auditing tissue collections that are under the license*
- *HTA training and certificates*

- *Conducting audits of other collections*
- *Conducting adoptions of tissues samples*
- *Annual returns and declarations of tissue samples for NDWRH*
- *Helping groups maintain their sample inventories.*

2: What guidelines must the department follow when managing human tissues?

We follow the HTA guidelines and the MSD policies for storing and using human samples in research. These rules apply to all human tissues in the department, whether or not they fall under the HTA license.

The rules we follow in the department in regards to human tissues aligns with the guidelines outline by MSD and can be found here: [MSD Policy on HumanSamples](#).

60 SECONDS WITH...Elizabeth Gan continued

Q: How does iPassport support the department, and what's your role with it?

Keeping your tissue inventory and consent files up to date and aligned with the policy is a requirement, and with our declarations of tissue holdings audit held once a year, enables us to monitor the whole department.

iPassport is the platform we use in the department to allocate SOP and training for members whether staff or student.

Q: You're also a research assistant. What do you do in that role?

I am also a research assistant for Karl Morten (2 days a week Thursday and Friday) in which I will be working with the new Raman microscope until the end of May.

This role allows me to engage actively in research and play with one of my favourite pieces of equipment – microscopes!

Q: What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

When I am not pestering people about human tissues I love to do my hobby's with include jewellery making, leather crafts, create organic skin care products and spin my own wool!



HR

New Sickness & Absence System

This term we were pleased to announce that the new functionality of managing absence and leave requests went live in [HR Self-Service](#).

Features:

- Submit annual leave requests
- Log absences due to sickness or other reasons
- View leave balances and history
- Check the status of leave requests and approvals
- Update or cancel leave requests if needed

If you have any queries or issues that you cannot resolve through the online guidance, contact HR@wrh.ox.ac.uk

[View the guidance for all staff here](#)



Personal Development Reviews Process

A new system, Actus, has been introduced this term to streamline the management and documentation of Personal Development Reviews (PDRs).

Currently, Actus is undergoing testing with several pilot groups within the department to assess its functionality and effectiveness.

Further information and updates will be provided in due course.

CONFERENCES

Dr. Hellner Presents APOLLO Trial Data

Last month at [IPVC2024](#), [Dr. Karin Hellner](#) presented the APOLLO trial data and its evaluation of VPT-200. The trial assessed the safety, efficacy, and immunogenicity of VPT-200 in participants with persistent HPV infection and co-existing low-grade cervical lesions.

Lydia Coxon Speaks at ESHRE Endometriosis Conference

[Lydia Coxon](#) delivered an in-depth presentation on the topic, “Mechanisms of Pain in Endometriosis: What Do We Know?”. In this session, Lydia explored complex mechanisms underlying pain in endometriosis, providing valuable insights into the condition.

Fit 4 Labour Presented at Inaugural Fetal Monitoring Day

[Antoniya Georgieva](#) and [Mariana Tome](#) presented at the Fetal Medicine Research Institute. Their talk highlighted the development and implementation of Fit 4 Labour - a cutting-edge digital tool designed for data-driven risk assessment at the onset of labour. This presentation provided a fantastic opportunity to showcase their work on a national stage.



SAFETY AND WELLBEING



Updates from the University's Safety Office

The roles and responsibilities for managing health and safety are outlined in the Health & Safety Management Responsibilities policy statement (S2/11). This is an overarching summary of the University's arrangements.

This applies to everyone, staff and students working for the department regardless of which site you are based or the type of work you do.

[Health & safety management policy statement](#)

Reminder: Report Accidents and Near Misses via IRIS

All staff and students are reminded to log any health, safety, or environmental incidents, including near misses, using the IRIS system. This platform is essential for reporting incidents that occur while engaging in University-related activities. Timely reporting is crucial for maintaining a safe and compliant environment across all areas of the University.



Wellbeing Blog

Courtesy of [Becky Jarvis-Foster](#), we introduced a new and bespoke wellbeing blog this term.

Our goal is to positively impact day-to-day life by empowering you to live well. Through accessible resources and practical tips, we aim to help you take charge of your mental health and explore new avenues for overall wellbeing.

Whether you're looking for advice on stress management, nutrition, mindfulness, or fitness, the blog offers a range of alternative approaches to suit everyone.

[Access the blog here](#)

Latest blog: [Managing Your Xmas Finances](#)



Thrive

Thrive Mental Wellbeing is a free service within the department to help us look after our mental health. This App provides you with tools to manage your mental wellbeing and understand your emotions.

You can download the app via this QR code, using access code NDWRH1937.

Please note, you do not need to use your University email address to sign up.

[For more information click here.](#)





Happy
Holidays