

Welcome to the 11th issue of the NIHR Exeter Clinical Research Facility (CRF) newsletter

The aim of this newsletter is to highlight the achievements of our facility, provide an overview of our current projects, and show how you can become involved, or continue to be involved, in improving healthcare through research.

Exeter 10,000 Update & NIHR BioResource

Although, the last year has been marked by the continued challenge of enabling research activity to continue, whilst working around the ever-changing profile of COVID-19 and its impact on us all, we are pleased to announce that the CRF has been successful in obtaining funding for a further 5 years from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to support our ongoing research here in Exeter.

We continued throughout the last year to increase our non-COVID research related activity, such that, at the time of writing, most of the research we support is non-COVID related including resuming recruitment to Exeter 10,000 and we are hoping to start inviting existing Exeter 10,000 participants for a follow-up visit at the CRF.

We also continue to recruit participants to the national NIHR BioResource, and have now successfully recruited over 1000 participants to the study here in Exeter. If you've not yet participated in the NIHR BioResource, more information can be found here: <https://exetercrfnihr.org/about/nihr-bioresource/>

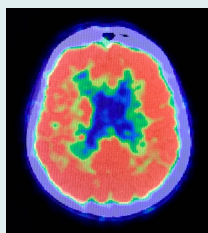
Did you know the CRF is on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and even has a YouTube channel?

Have a look at our YouTube channel here at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQex1LJDU1o3jRO9ysYc2EA/>

Research Highlights

The **Deep and Frequent Phenotyping Study (DFP)** is part of the dementia study portfolio taking place in the CRF. The study has fully screened seven participants to date with the final part of the screening being a PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scan looking for the presence of Amyloid in the brain. These participants have been lucky enough to be the first to use the Mireille Gillings Neuroimaging Centre which is a collaboration between the University of Exeter and the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust.

The centre will also be used for the study's MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scans which will be part of the baseline appointments and will hopefully commence in April 2022.



The **Astraeus study** is a phase 2, 20 week trial of a drug that is hoped will reduce lung damage and slow progression of disease in patients with alpha1 antitrypsin deficiency related emphysema. Alpha 1 antitrypsin is a type of protein that blocks the effects of certain substances that can cause damage to the lungs and liver and people with this condition have a higher risk of lung disease.



Despite the study being paused to recruitment during lockdown, the CRF screened nine potential participants and successfully recruited three into the study. Our last participant completed the treatment phase in March 2022. The trial sponsors are hoping to open the phase 3 part of Astraeus later in 2022.

The **TriMaster study** aimed to improve the treatment of Type 2 Diabetes by learning how individuals respond to different drugs. 525 people at 24 centres took part in the study led by Professor Andrew Hattersley at the CRF between 2016-2021.



This was the biggest trial of its type in diabetes and was unique in allowing participants to compare their experience on three different diabetes drugs. Overall, the drugs worked equally well at lowering blood sugar. However, researchers found that using a person's BMI or kidney function, can show which drug is likely to be better. They also found that people preferred different drugs; the preferred drug was usually that which gave the lowest blood sugar and fewest side effects.

Thus, the study has shown that the right drug is not the same for everyone and that it is possible to predict how a drug is likely to work using a person's BMI or kidney function. This research means we can start to think about giving patients more individually tailored advice when deciding their future treatment.

Please contact us if your circumstances have changed, you have moved house, changed phone number, or have received this by post but would be happy to provide us with an email address to save us ongoing costs:

Call us on **01392 408181** or email: crf@exeter.ac.uk

More Research Highlights

The Exeter CRF was one of six UK sites that has contributed to the **VIP study** www.vipstudy.uk sponsored by Imperial College London. The study recruited over 600 patients, with and without inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The IBD cohort were on immunosuppressive medication. The Exeter patients without IBD (healthy controls) were recruited through the Exeter 10,000 cohort. The patients completed a questionnaire and donated blood samples that were then screened for COVID-19 antibodies and other tests to investigate how the immune system responds to coronavirus vaccination. The study results are not only relevant to the IBD community but may also be reflected in other diseases that use the immunosuppressive therapies investigated. The latest data from the study has been published and can be read in full here: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langas/article/PIIS2468-1253\(22\)00005-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langas/article/PIIS2468-1253(22)00005-X/fulltext)



One in 10 people may still have clinically relevant levels of potentially infectious SARS-CoV-2 still after 10 days, according to **data published in January 2022 from the VALID study**, led by Professor Lorna Harries at the University of Exeter and funded by Animal Free Research UK. The study used a newly adapted test which can detect whether the virus was potentially still active in samples from 176 people in Exeter who had tested positive for COVID-19 on standard PCR tests.

Ketamine and psychological therapy helped severe alcoholics abstain for longer in KARE trial. People with severe alcohol disorder were able to stay off alcohol for longer when they were treated with low doses of ketamine combined with psychological therapy in a clinical trial. The Ketamine for reduction of Alcohol Relapse (KARE) phase II trial was led by the University of Exeter and funded by the Medical Research Council. Lead author Professor Celia Morgan, of the University of Exeter, said: "Alcoholism can destroy lives, and we urgently need new ways to help people cut down. We found that controlled, low doses of ketamine combined with psychological therapy can help people stay off alcohol for longer than a placebo. This is extremely encouraging, as we normally see three out of every four people returning to heavy drinking within six months of quitting alcohol, so this result represents a great improvement."



To read our full research stories and to find our latest news visit here: <https://exetercrfnihr.org/news/>

Awards for our Researchers

The CRF-supported Royal Devon and Exeter Tissue Bank (RDETB) team and the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust (RD&E) Research and Development (R&D) department were both shortlisted in the Clinical Nursing category of the Nursing Times Awards.

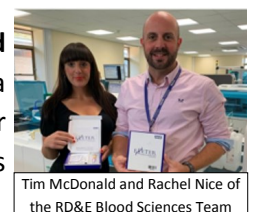
The RDETB collects 'spare' tissue samples from patients for research during their routine care and supports a diverse range of specialties, including cancer, diabetes, vascular medicine, obstetrics, maternity and COVID-19. This is made possible by a nurse-led research team, who identify areas of collaboration, and then support teams through all stages of the project.



RDETB Team

The RD&E R&D team were shortlisted for their innovative strategies to increase the engagement of clinical staff in research, including the Chief Nurse Research Fellows programme for clinical staff to undertake bespoke research training; a nurse-led Embedding Research In Care (ERIC) unit to help with innovation, evaluation and research participation; and establishing a Clinical Academic Network to aid collaborative working.

The RD&E Blood Sciences Team have won the HSI Acute Sector Innovation of the Year Award for their work on home blood testing services. The team designed, developed and tested a national at-home finger prick blood collection and testing service which gives patients greater control over their own health. Since the service went live in March 2021, the team has performed over a thousand tests for clinical and research services, including many CRF studies.



Tim McDonald and Rachel Nice of the RD&E Blood Sciences Team

New role for Lidia



We are pleased to announce that Lidia Romanczuk, a member of our RDETB team, has recently qualified as a Clinical Research Practitioner (CRP). Lidia is only the second person in the South West Peninsula to qualify since the role was introduced in April 2020. CRPs are working in research delivery roles that involve direct contact with patients and other study participants and are now identified as an occupational group in health and care by the UK Professional Standards Authority.



The **DARE Study** continues as planned to follow up participants already taking part. Fair processing information which clarifies what we do with your data can be found at <https://www.diabetesgenes.org/current-research/dare/>