IMPERIAL

CONNECTIONS 2026 – 2nd Annual Residential Conference

(Consortium for Neonatal Encephalopathy Time Critical Neuroprotection Trials)

Advancing Neuroprotection Trials

Two days of shared learning, practical insight, and collaborative progress.

Join colleagues from across the network to exchange ideas, share experience, and collaborate on the next phase of neonatal neuroprotection trials.

Meeting Agenda

Wellcome Genome Campus,
Hinxton Hall
Cambridge | 15th – 16th May 2026

RSVP here before 27 April 2026

Conference Day 1

Friday 15th May 2026

Morning Session | Hinxton Hall

09:00 – 12:00	**CONNECTIONS: Magnesium & Melatonin Platform in HIE Trial: Protocol Discussion** LMIC Principal investigators only

Afternoon Session | Hinxton Hall

13:00 – 13:30	**HIE Neuroprotection: Last two decades** ***Prof Seetha Shankaran, Wayne State***
13:30 – 14:00	**HIE Neuroprotection: Next two decades** ***Prof Sudhin Thayyil, Imperial College***
14:00 – 14:30	**Innovative Clinical Trials to fast-track live saving therapies** ***Prof Max Parmar, UCL MRC CTU***
14:30 – 15:00	**PIVOTAL: An Adaptive Platform Trial for Paediatric Intensive Care** ***Prof Padmanabhan Ramnarayan, Imperial College***
15:00 – 16:00	***Discussion***
16:00 – 17:00	**Refreshment Break**

Evening Session | Hinxton Hall

17:00 – 17:30	**COMET Update: Progress, Impact and Future Directions** ***Dr Stuti Pant, Imperial College***
17:30 – 18:00	**COMET in LNU: Recruiting Site Perspective: Panel Discussion** ***Dr Elizabeth Lek*** *(Hillingdon);* ***Dr Hemant Ambulkar*** *(Darent Valley);* ***Dr Kudzai Mugweni*** *(Turnbridge Wells);* ***Dr Rosaline Garr*** *(Whiston)*
18:00 – 18:30	**COMET - CAFFEINE Trial** ***Dr Reema Garegrat , Imperial***
18:30 – 19:00	**Sedation and feeding during cooling: Evidence & Knowledge gaps** ***Dr Ujwal Kariholu***
19:00 – 20:00	***Discussion***
20:00	**Dinner & Informal Networking**

Conference Day 2

Saturday 16th May 2026

Morning Session | Hinxton Hall

09:00 – 09:30	Learning from Investigations: Insights from MSNI HIE Cases *Dr Paul Mannix, MSNI*
09:30 – 10:00	Increasing Caesarean: An Obstetric Perspective *Prof. Andy Shennan, Kings College*
10:00 – 10:30	*Discussion*
10:30 – 11:00	MRI in Mild HIE *Dr Farah Alobeidi, Imperial College*
11:00 - 12:00	CFM in Mild HIE: Lead Placement, Interpretation, and Artefacts *Dr Ronit Pressler , Great Ormand Street Hospital*
12:00 – 12:30	*Discussion*
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch

Afternoon Session | Hinxton Hall

13:00 – 14:00	Neurological assessment: *Case Scenarios* *Prof Sudhin Thayyil, Prof Seetha Shankaran and Dr Reema Garegrat*
14:00 – 14:30	MR Spectroscopy standardization *Dr Enrico De Vita, Great Ormand Street Hospital*
14:30 – 15:00	Gene Expression Endotypes for Personalized Neuroprotection *Dr Paolo Montaldo, Imperial College*
15:00 – 15:30	Transforming RDN funding to facilitate life changing clinical trials *Dr Mildred Iro, Queen Mary University of London*
15:30 – 16:00	Discussion and Closing Remarks *Prof Seetha Shankaran*

Imperial Team

Professor Seetha Shankaran

University of Texas at Austin & Wayne State University

Prof. Shankaran is a world leader in neonatal neuroprotection and one of the most respected neonatal academics globally. Her research has transformed clinical care and inspired researchers worldwide to uphold the high standards for clinical trials that she established. She led the first randomized controlled trial of whole-body hypothermia for HIE (NEJM 2005, 2012), and her findings were subsequently replicated in three major trials—the TOBY trial (NEJM 2009), ICE trial (JAMA Pediatrics 2010), and neo.nEURO trial (Pediatrics 2010)—establishing the global standard of care in high-income countries. She subsequently led the Optimising Cooling trial (JAMA 2014, 2016) and co-led the Delayed Hypothermia trial (JAMA 2017), the HELIX trial (Lancet Global Health 2021), and the PREMIE Hypothermia trial (JAMA Pediatrics 2025).

Professor Sudhin Thayyil

Chair of Perinatal Neuroscience, Imperial College London

Prof. Thayyil leads the world's largest research programme in neonatal neuroprotection and has served as Chief Investigator for major international HIE studies, including MARBLE, HELIX, EMBRACE, PREVENT, CONNECTIONS, and COMET. He has held both an NIHR Clinician Scientist award and an NIHR Advanced Fellowship. His group was the first to describe the heterogeneity of HIE using gene expression profiles and to demonstrate how this variability influences treatment responses. He has secured over £24 million in research funding, and his team maintains an exceptional record of successful external fellowships—the highest of any neonatal research group in the UK.

Dr Paolo Montaldo

Senior Lecturer & Neonatal Consultant, University of Campania and Imperial College London

Dr. Montaldo is a clinical academic neonatologist with expertise in neuroprotection, neonatal neurology, bioinformatics, and continuous glucose monitoring. He completed a PhD at Imperial College London in 2019 under the supervision of Prof. Thayyil, supported by an MRC Doctoral Fellowship, focusing on gene expression in neonatal encephalopathy. He is a world leader in transcriptomics in HIE, with over 70 publications and research funding exceeding £3 million. Dr. Montaldo leads international sites for the COMET trial and is a gold-standard Bayley IV assessor.

Dr Reema Garegrat

NIHR Doctoral Fellow, Imperial College London

Dr. Garegrat completed paediatric and neonatal subspecialty training in Mumbai and Pune before joining Imperial College London as a Neonatal Neurology Senior Clinical Research Fellow. She is the lead of the EMBRACE trial and the neurological training lead for the COMET trial. She is a certified Bayley-IV examiner and gold-standard assessor, and an Expanded Modified Sarnat (EMS) trainer, having trained over 1000 clinicians from more than 50 NHS hospitals for the COMET trial. She has published over 20 research papers and secured grant funding exceeding £3 million.

Imperial Team

Dr Stuti Pant

Senior Programme Manager, Imperial College London

Pant is a trial methodologist and mixed-methods researcher in the Department of Brain Sciences at Imperial College London, with a Social Science background. Since joining Imperial in 2019, she has published 17 papers—including in *The Lancet* journals and *BMJ*—and secured over £5 million in research funding. Her work spans grassroots health in India, policy engagement at the World Health Assembly, and leadership in trial management, including redefining communication, ethics, and trial participation. She completed her PhD in 2024 on bereavement and newborn death and has been recognized for research leadership, public engagement, and EDI initiatives, with a strong commitment to improving outcomes for mothers and babies.

Dr Thilipan Thaventhiran

Trial Manager, Imperial College London

Dr Thaventhiran is a qualified paediatric nurse with a Bachelor's and Master's from Imperial College and a PhD in Immunology from Liverpool University. He has over four years of experience in clinical and academic research within the NHS at Queen Mary University London and King's College London, leading NIHR portfolio studies and multi-centre CTIMPs. He has co-authored 17+ publications, managed large datasets, and has extensive knowledge of regulatory requirements. He joined Imperial College London in 2025 as trial manager for the COMET trial.

Ms Harini Venkateswaran

IT and Database Manager, Imperial College London

Venkateswaran is a Software Engineer and Database Manager in the Department of Brain Sciences at Imperial College London. She has been involved in data management for the HIE trial for over a decade, driven by a strong passion for advancing research.

She is fully committed to ensuring accuracy in research data and has hands-on expertise in developing and managing databases, applying data quality standards, and overseeing the broader IT infrastructure and systems that support the team's work. In the COMET trial, her role is to ensure a robust database and provide easy access for clinical teams, enabling the smooth and efficient use of research data collection systems.

Our Guest Speakers

Professor Mahesh (Max) Palmer

Professor of Medical Statistics and Epidemiology, University College London

Professor Mahesh (Max) Parmar, OBE, is Professor of Medical Statistics and Epidemiology at University College London and Director of both the MRC Clinical Trials Unit and the Institute of Clinical Trials and Methodology. An internationally recognised leader in clinical trial methodology, he has played a pivotal role in advancing innovative trial designs, including multi-arm, multi-stage and adaptive platform trials. He was a founding member and Associate Director of the National Cancer Research Network, contributing to a major increase in patient participation in clinical trials across England. Professor Parmar has authored over 450 peer-reviewed publications and has received numerous honours, including an OBE for services to medical research and the Bradford Hill Medal for outstanding contributions to medical statistics.

Professor Andrew Shennan

Professor of Obstetrics, King's College London.

Professor Andrew Shennan, OBE, is Tommy's Chair of Maternal and Fetal Health and Professor of Obstetrics at King's College London. An internationally recognised leader in preterm birth and pre-eclampsia research, he directs the Preterm Birth Surveillance Clinic at St Thomas' Hospital and has led major global trials to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes. He has published extensively, secured significant research funding, and advises on national and international maternity policy. His former PhD students include Professor Lucy Chappell, now CEO of the NIHR, and he currently serves as the Obstetric Lead for the COMET trial.

Professor Ramnarayan (Ram) Padmanabhan

Professor of Paediatric Critical Care, Imperial College London.

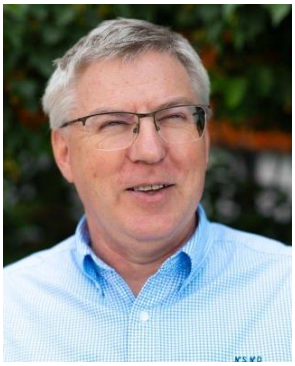
Professor Padmanabhan is NIHR Research Professor of Paediatric Critical Care at Imperial College London and Honorary Consultant in Paediatric Intensive Care at St Mary's Hospital. He is a nationally recognised leader in paediatric critical care research, with a focus on pragmatic clinical trials, respiratory support, and data-driven decision-making in critically ill children. He has led major NIHR-funded studies, including the FIRST-ABC trials, the largest trials of non-invasive respiratory support in children, and the DEPICT study, which informed national standards for paediatric critical care transport. He also chairs the Paediatric Critical Care Society Study Group and leads national initiatives to advance trial methodology and innovation in PICU.

Dr. Ronit Pressler

Consultant in Clinical Neurophysiology, Great Ormond Street Hospital

Dr. Pressler is Consultant in Clinical Neurophysiology and Clinical Lead of Telemetry at Great Ormond Street Hospital and Honorary Associate Professor in Developmental Neurosciences at UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health. She leads therapy innovation and neuromonitoring standards for neonatal seizures, including continuous EEG in HIE, through the ILAE Neonatal Task Force, advancing multi-centre monitoring consistency and improved long-term neurological outcomes.

Our Guest Speakers



Dr Paul Mannix

Lead Neonatal Clinical Advisor, Maternity and Newborn Safety Investigations (MNSI).

Dr Paul Mannix is Lead Neonatal Clinical Advisor at Maternity and Newborn Safety Investigations and a Consultant Neonatologist with extensive experience in neonatal medicine. He has worked in the NHS for over two decades, with clinical interests in neonatal physiology, nutrition, and education. He plays a national role in improving maternity and newborn safety through independent investigations, helping to identify learning from adverse events and translate this into system-wide improvements in clinical practice. He has contributed to training, guideline development, and multidisciplinary learning to enhance the quality and safety of neonatal care.

Dr Farah Alobeidi

Consultant Neuroradiologist, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.

Dr Farah Alobeidi is a Consultant Neuroradiologist at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, specialising in adult and paediatric neuroradiology. Her clinical interests include advanced neuroimaging, neuro-oncology, and inflammatory and degenerative brain disorders. She trained at the University of Cambridge and completed specialist neuroradiology fellowships in London and Toronto. She is actively involved in research and education, with a focus on applying advanced imaging techniques to improve diagnosis and clinical care.

Conference Location

Venue Details

Hinxton Hall Conference Centre
Wellcome Genome Campus
Hinxton, Saffron Walden
CB10 1RQ United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 1223 495123

Map & Directions

For Sat Nav, please use postcode **CB10 1SA**

Travel Information

By Car

From the South (M11 Junction 9):

- Exit at Junction 9 (A11 Newmarket)
- Take first exit onto A1301 towards Cambridge
- At roundabout, take first left (~800m)
- At next roundabout, follow signs to Genome Campus

From the North (M11 Junction 10):

- Exit at Junction 10
- Follow A505 towards Saffron Walden
- At roundabout, take A1301 towards Saffron Walden
- Continue past Hinxton village turnings
- Turn right at next roundabout, signposted Genome Campus

Parking:

150 free parking spaces available for delegates.

By Train

The closest stations are Whittlesford Parkway, Great Chesterford, and Audley End, all on the Cambridge–London Liverpool Street line (journey time from London ~1 hour). Cambridge is the main railway hub, served by both London King's Cross and Liverpool Street lines, as well as routes from the north.

By Taxi

Pre-booking is strongly recommended when travelling from train stations or airports.

Local taxi companies:

- City Cabs (Sawston): 01223 832832
- Veezu (Cambridge): 01223 715715

Taxis can drop off directly at the Conference Centre. Drivers should navigate to Wellcome Genome Campus (CB10 1SA) and follow on-site signage

Accommodation

Hotel

Hinxton Hall Conference Centre Accommodation
Wellcome Genome Campus, Hinxton, Saffron Walden CB10 1RQ
Phone: +44 (0)1223 495000

Check-in: from 3:00 PM (Friday)
Check-out: by 10:00 AM (Saturday)

Please check in at the Conference Centre reception desk on arrival.

Rooms

A total of 55 rooms have been pre-booked for delegates:

- 30 rooms – Mulberry Court (air-conditioned)
- 25 rooms – Willow Court

Rooms are en-suite and include single, double, twin, triple, and accessible options, set within a quiet campus environment.

Parking

Free parking is available on-site for all guests.

EV Charging

Electric vehicle charging points are available between 7:00 PM – 7:00 AM in a designated car park approximately 5 minutes' walk from the accommodation.

Food & Drink

Breakfast is included with all room bookings

Booking

Rooms have been pre-reserved for delegates.