



Imperial College
Academic Health
Science Centre
Improving Patient Care

Research
Careers
Case Study



Dr Lina Johansson
NIHR Clinical
Lecturer

Dietitian

RESEARCH: DELAYING ONSET OF END STAGE RENAL DISEASE THROUGH DIET

How did you get into research?

When I first started working as a dietitian, I enjoyed analysing data about patients before/after different interventions to try to understand the impact of my care to therefore help determine the best treatment for the patient. It was not formal research but in effect I was trying to answer a question by collecting and analysing data, writing it up and disseminating the findings at conferences. I found this to be really rewarding so after 5 years as a clinical dietitian, I sought to consolidate these skills by undertaking research full time as part of a PhD.

What do you enjoy about research?

Research is inquisitive, uses imagination and pushes boundaries of knowledge that leads to improving clinical care. It is about finding answers to questions about how health and wellbeing can be improved. I enjoy being able to contribute to that. Research is also synonymous to continuous learning where the landscape is constantly changing so we constantly have to keep abreast of new ideas and knowledge - so I am rarely bored!

What was the most difficult aspect of doing your PhD?

Doing a PhD is like climbing a very high, rugged mountain – you start off with a gentle stroll but the resilience and commitment you need steadily increases until you reach the summit (the viva!). The experience changed me as a person, as a researcher, as well as a clinician and educator.

What difference has your research training and experience made to your career?

Doing a PhD and working in research has made an immeasurable difference to my career. Partly my confidence has grown together with the new skills that I have developed (and continue to develop). Clinically, I view patient care as a cycle of providing a high level and efficient service supported by expanding knowledge through research; I regularly supervise Masters level dissertations; I

support others in developing their research ideas and in submitting successful funding applications. I also find myself collaborating with researchers – also in other parts of the world – who I have admired throughout my working life. Therefore doing a PhD has influenced every aspect of my working life.

What has made a difference to progressing your research career?

The single most important factor has been the support of key individuals who have mentored me throughout my research career, some of which have become collaborators. Imperial has been fantastic at providing the environment to undertake research which includes the link with the College as well as having the management support to pursue this career pathway. The funders have also been excellent – the NIHR funded my clinical lectureship and have also provided research training and support. My PhD was funded by a joint Charity and Industry collaboration (Kidney Research UK and Baxter Healthcare) which also provided support for the duration.

Where do you see your clinical academic career going over the next five years?

In the next 5 years I see myself as having an established research programme with a team of researchers that I am developing. I would like to be making a measureable impact on patient care and changing how renal dietetic care is delivered. I will continue being hands on as a clinician and passing on my experience to others – be it peers or students. ◆

Dr Lina Johansson, NIHR Clinical Lecturer, Imperial College London,
l.johansson@imperial.ac.uk