

PhD Opportunity

Exploring the Use of Social Media Platforms for Supporting Individuals with Long-Term Conditions: Impacts on Self-Management and Healthcare Engagement

Supervisory Team

Director of Studies: Professor Rebecca Stack

Supervisors: Dr Clive Sealey

Research Group: [Living with Long-Term Conditions Research Group](#)

The PhD Opportunity:

This PhD will investigate how individuals with long-term conditions (LTCs) use social media platforms to access informal care, social support, and advise from people with lived experience of illness. The PhD will explore the implications of these social and informatic interactions for illness beliefs, self-management practices, and engagement with formal healthcare systems.

With the rise of digital peer networks, people living with LTCs are increasingly turning to platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, and YouTube for emotional support, practical advice, and community connection. These informal systems may fill gaps left by formal services, particularly in contexts of limited access, stigma, or fragmented care. Such networks can also provide social support and exert social influence on how individuals perceive and manage their conditions.

The project may adopt a range of approaches to investigate these phenomena, potentially including but not limited to:

- Digital ethnography of online communities.
- Qualitative interviews with individuals living with LTCs.
- Stakeholder engagement with healthcare professionals and policymakers.
- Policy and practice mapping to identify integration opportunities.

Applicants may choose to focus on a specific LTC and may also wish to explore how these digital support networks operate within hard-to-reach communities or among groups facing barriers to healthcare access. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of patient-led digital ecosystems, inform service design, examine the impact of misinformation, and explore how online social support influences, self-management, healthcare decisions and wider policy development.

Application Process:

To begin the application process please go to

<https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

The Interview:

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

Funding your PhD:

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

Research Degrees at Worcester

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2025 in which we ranked 3rd for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team.
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station.
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors.
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars.

Widening Participation:

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Prof Stack at r.stack@worc.ac.uk

