

PhD Studentship

Enhancing Mental Health Care in Rural Settings through Electronic Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (ePROMs): The EMPOWER Study.

Supervisory team:

Director of Studies: Professor Dez Kyte, Professor of Physiotherapy, School of Allied Health & Community, University of Worcester, UK. Associate member of the Centre for Patient-Reported Outcomes Research, University of Birmingham, UK.

Supervisors: Professor Elizabeth Hughes, Professor of Mental Health Inequalities, Director of Rural Mental Health Research Unit, lead for NIHR THRIVE Programme

Dr Molly Miley, Research Fellow, THRIVE Rural Mental Health Unit University of Worcester, UK

Research Unit: The University of Worcester have been awarded a National Institute for Health and Social Care (NIHR) Mental Health Leaders Award to establish a programme of research designed to address mental health inequalities in rural settings. The programme of research will have 3 areas of focus: Earlier intervention and detection of serious mental illness (SMI); Suicide Prevention; and Digital Support. The THRIVE programme has been developed in partnership with colleagues at the Institute for Mental Health, University of Birmingham and there will be opportunities for collaborative working for doctoral candidates across both Worcester and Birmingham.

The PhD Studentship:

Applications are invited for a full-time PhD studentship for the project Enhancing Mental Health Care in Rural Settings through Electronic Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (ePROMs): The EMPOWER Study.

Context

Mental health inequalities remain a pressing concern in rural communities, where access to timely and appropriate care is often limited by geographic, socioeconomic, and systemic barriers. Individuals living in these areas frequently experience elevated levels of psychological distress, yet face challenges in accessing mental health services and sustaining engagement with care.

Electronic Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (ePROMs) offer a promising solution. [1] These tools enable individuals to report symptoms and wellbeing remotely, facilitating continuous monitoring and personalised care. [2] ePROMs have demonstrated benefits in other clinical populations, including improved symptom management, enhanced communication between patients and clinicians, and better health outcomes. [3]

Despite their potential, the use of ePROMs in rural mental health care remains underexplored. There is a need to understand how these tools can be effectively implemented in rural settings, tailored to local needs, and integrated into existing care pathways to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes.

Aims and Objectives

This PhD will explore the use of ePROMs to support mental health care in rural communities. The successful applicant will develop a programme of research to:

- Investigate the feasibility and acceptability of ePROMs in rural mental health settings.
- Identify barriers and facilitators to implementation.
- Evaluate the impact of ePROMs on patient engagement, symptom monitoring, and care outcomes.
- Co-design strategies for sustainable integration into rural health services.

Indicative methodology

Phase 1: Scoping Review

A systematic scoping review will be conducted to map existing evidence on the use of electronic Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (ePROMs) in mental health care, with a particular focus on rural populations. This will identify gaps in knowledge and inform the design of subsequent empirical work.

Phase 2: Qualitative Exploration

Semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups will be undertaken with service users, clinicians, and stakeholders in rural mental health services to explore perceptions of ePROMs, barriers and facilitators to implementation, and contextual factors influencing uptake. Data will be analysed thematically using reflexive approaches.

Phase 3: Co-Design

Drawing on findings from Phases 1 and 2, a co-design process will be facilitated with rural service users and providers to develop a contextually appropriate ePROM strategy.

References:

1. Padalkar TV, Henderson NL, Dent DN, Hendrix E, Smith C, Huang CS, Kaufmann T, McGowan C, Young Pierce J, Ingram SA, Stover AM, Basch EM, Howell D, Weiner BJ, Odom JN, Rocque GB. Patient Perspectives on

Technological Barriers and Implementation Strategies Leveraged During a Real-World Remote Symptom Monitoring Program. JCO Clin Cancer Inform. 2025 Jun;9:e2400232. doi: 10.1200/CCI-24-00232. Epub 2025 Jun 23. PMID: 40540708; PMCID: PMC12184978.

2. Hendrix EK, Henderson NL, Padalkar TV, Kaufmann T, Ingram SA, Dent DN, Huang CS, Odom JN, Weiner BJ, Howell D, Stover AM, Basch EM, McGowan C, Pierce JY, Rocque GB. Qualitative Study of Health Care Team Perception of the Benefits and Limitations of Remote Symptom Monitoring. JCO Oncol Pract. 2025 Jun;21(6):853-861. doi: 10.1200/OP-24-00593. Epub 2024 Dec 11. PMID: 39661925; PMCID: PMC12152210.
3. Rocque GB, Franks JA, Deng L, Caston NE, Williams CP, Azuero A, Dent D, Jackson BE, McGowan C, Henderson NL, Huang CS, Ingram S, Odom JN, Eltoum N, Weiner B, Howell D, Stover AM, Pierce JY, Basch EM. Remote Symptom Monitoring With Electronic Patient-Reported Outcomes in Clinical Cancer Populations. JAMA Netw Open. 2025 May 1;8(5):e259852. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.9852. PMID: 40358948; PMCID: PMC12076171.

Details of the studentship:

The studentship is offered for a 4-year period on a full-time basis. During the period of your studentship you will receive the following:

- a tax-free bursary of £19,660 for 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years
- a budget to support your project costs
- a laptop and other IT equipment or software as appropriate to the project
- use of the Doctoral School facilities

You will be expected to play an active role in the life of both the Doctoral School and of the School. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in learning and teaching within the School under the guidance of your Director of Studies.

Application Process:

To begin the application process for this studentship please go to our [webpage](#) and click 'apply now' next to the project you wish to apply for.

It is expected that applicants will have the following qualifications:

- A Masters in the area of Health Care or equivalent professional experience.
- A First or Upper Second Honours Degree

It is also expected that applicants will be able to demonstrate the following:

- A sound understanding of and interest in both the project and the wider subject area
- Experience of relevant research methods and skills
- Ability to contribute to the research design of the project
- Proficiency in oral and written English
- Proficiency in IT relevant to the project

- Ability to organise and meet deadlines
- Good interpersonal skills
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to work as part of a team

The Interview:

The closing date for applications is **Wednesday 29th October 2025**. The interview will provisionally be held in person on **Wednesday 12th November 2025**. Shortlisted candidates will be given 7 day's-notice of interview. As we receive a large volume of applications for our PhD studentships, we will only contact shortlisted candidates. In advance of interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit a sample of their written work (e.g. a publication or a dissertation).

Alongside the interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to deliver a brief presentation (10 minutes) on a topic related to the studentship. This will provide an opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the project context and potential research approaches. Candidates are invited to present on the following suggested topic: **The role of ePROMs in addressing mental health inequalities in rural communities**. To support their presentation, candidates are encouraged to use a concise slide deck and reflect on how their background or interests align with the aims of the EMPOWER project.

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 2023 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 Professor Derek Kyte by email d.kyte@worc.ac.uk