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IN THIS ISSUE

The Centre for Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use (CREMS) houses a large number of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) who are seeking to establish a novel and independent program of research and lay the foundations for a successful career in the field of comorbid mental health and substance use disorders. The ECR period, commonly defined as seven to ten years post-PhD, is filled with multiple challenges that can be successfully navigated in diverse ways. In this edition of the CREMS newsletter, we have decided to stray from the typical content of past newsletters and give our ECRs the opportunity to write about how they have faced some of the unique challenges of being an ECR. As such, the tone of the current newsletter is less formal and more practical than previous newsletters. It is hoped that this newsletter is spread widely through your networks to those who are in the early stages of their career.

Postdoctoral researcher Dr Katrina Champion begins this edition by summarising the advice from six senior researchers at CREMS about forming a successful research career. Emeritus Professor Kevin Gournay then discusses the virtues of a well-rounded researcher and how training programs can foster the development of the necessary skills for research. Six ECRs then discuss and provide advice for ECRs on a range of different issues commonly faced by ECRs, including: strategies and resources to improve productivity, developing ECR-led networks and training programs, finding your niche and developing expertise, embracing social media when building a research profile, and the challenges faced when transitioning fields early in your career or taking up an international post-doc position.

ABOUT

Funded in 2012 by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, the Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use aims to increase the knowledge base regarding the effective prevention and treatment of comorbid mental health and substance use disorders. The research centre is a world first, bringing together the largest concentration of internationally recognised comorbidity researchers from around the world.

The CREMS newsletter is just one of the ways you can learn more about our work. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and via our website to keep up to date with the latest research in comorbid mental health and substance use.

This issue of the CREMS Newsletter was edited by Louise Mewton and Matthew Sunderland.
What you wish you knew as an ECR...

Tips for building a successful career in research

“The academic career ladder is actually a jungle gym – there are many different career paths and the way through will be nothing like what you imagine it to be. Be prepared to be nimble – and if you can stick it out it will make sense.”

Transitioning from a PhD student to a post-doctoral researcher is an exciting time, with opportunities to form new collaborations and professional relationships, to develop your own program of research, find your niche, and to mentor others with similar interests. However, it is not without difficulties. Gaining funding to support your research, finding students to mentor and supervise, and maintaining your publication output, all while defending the importance and integrity of your research in a sometimes thorny environment, requires persistence and a thick skin!
We asked six senior researchers at CREMs what advice they’d give their former ECR self to have a successful research career. This is what they said...

Building strong and enduring collaborations with clinicians and other key-stakeholders is critical for ensuring your research has a real-world impact.

Find colleagues and collaborators who you enjoy working with, who you share a research vision with and who can complement and expand on your skills.

Research can, at times, be an isolating endeavour so it’s crucial to have colleagues with whom you can bounce ideas off. If those colleagues come from different disciplinary backgrounds with different approaches to a common research question then you will find that your combined efforts are substantial.

Nurturing professional relationships can lead to unexpected collaborations and projects, opportunities that you wouldn’t otherwise see coming, and personal and professional rewards that cannot be achieved by focusing only on personal success.

“If you surround yourself by a great team and put in a bit of hard work, you are destined to have a successful research career.”

- It is the passion for what you do as a researcher that drives the search for new and better ways to disseminate and engage, teach and lead.
- Seek out opportunities and be guided by your supervisors and mentors on what is expected of you at your stage of career.
- Do something you believe in and the rest will come easily. If you’re passionate about the difference your research can make, it’s not hard to stay motivated.
- Find your niche, nurture it and develop it into something that you, and only you, are known for.
Publishing first-author papers is an important part of being a productive ECR. However, try to strike a balance between publishing high-impact papers where you are the leading author, and smaller papers that you have co-authored, which can show your ability to contribute expertise across a range of projects, and to a number of teams.

While papers and citations are the mainstay of academic currency, there are many other ways to have an impact that can be just as valuable.

It is important to have a clear message and a clear audience for your publications – regardless of where they are published.

Once published, promote your work in as many ways as possible. Don’t wait for people to stumble across your publications, actively disseminate and publicise your research publications via social media, at conferences and meetings and within your professional networks.

“When thinking of impact, think beyond journal articles, impact factors, and citations.”

Keep applying for funding because times change, review panels change, the importance of particular research questions change and your ability to “sell” the research changes.

Enquire about travel grants for national and international conferences. There are several travel grant schemes available, particularly for PhD and postdoctoral researchers. Be proactive. Talk to your supervisors and peers about opportunities you could apply for and sign up for grant alerts set up by various organisations.

Look into early career fellowship and training opportunities and plan early (approx. 1 year before you are seeking funding) with your supervisors. But do not to rely on getting one. They are extremely competitive and there simply isn’t enough funding for all the incredibly worthy applicants. Make sure you have a plan B…C… and D.

Build yourself a very thick skin and try to get the hang of positive reframing.

Some of what we do as researchers is governed by forces beyond our control – you never know which projects will get funded, you never know when collaborative opportunities will present themselves.
Some of our senior researchers have been at NDARC since starting out as a Research Assistant, then moving through as a PhD student, post-doctoral researcher and Associate Professor. This has allowed them to develop strong professional collaborations and make a significant contribution to their passion and area of interest.

Changing institutions, particularly internationally, can open up many professional opportunities including being forced to think independently, learning to work with a new mentor and a new team. Your new friendships and professional networks can form the basis of papers, grants and international trips.

Shifting your content area is always a possibility. It gives you the chance to apply your skills and expertise to a new team and research interest. As well as this, a change of scenery can be as good as a holiday – it gives you the opportunity to reboot the system and start afresh.

“A change of institutions is generally looked upon more favourably and has the potential to be hugely beneficial to your career. In spite of that I chose not to... and I am doing OK!”

‘Life happens’ and there are times when extended time off from work is needed.

If you do have extended time off, try to stay connected to the field. This may be through voluntary work, or could even be as simple as following relevant researchers or organisations on social media (e.g. Twitter) to stay up to date.

Don’t allow yourself to think that you’ve had too long off, that people won’t remember you, or that you won’t remember your old skills! You may be surprised to find that your skills haven’t disappeared.

Consider alternative career paths in academia. Academic leadership comes in many different forms – strategic advice and planning, high level administration and management – lots of things other than leading an independent program of research. There is definitely growing recognition of this in the field but we still have a long way to go before universities are willing to fund these positions and performance metrics can take these activities into account.
“Stay connected if you can in some way, but don’t let people make you feel like all is lost unless you come back firing on all cylinders after 6 months. It’s not true!”

These tips provide a brief overview of how ECRs can build a successful career in research. However it is important to remember that there is no template or recipe to follow in developing a successful or well-rounded academic career. Your path will inevitably be different from everyone else’s. What does appear to be critical for success is surrounding yourself with supportive colleagues, building professional collaborations (which might include a change of institutions or spending time abroad), being proactive in seeking out opportunities to develop your skills and progress your career, and staying connected to the field during extended time off.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Senior Leaders Advisory Group at CREMS for sharing their experiences and providing invaluable input into this article (From L to R: A/Prof Kath Mills, Dr Nicola Newton, A/Prof Frances Kay-Lambkin, Prof Maree Teesson, Dr Cath Chapman and A/Prof Tim Slade)
Early Career Researchers
A vital part of CREMS

Emeritus Prof Gournay has been a Professor of Psychiatric Nursing at the Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College London, since 1995. He has over 30 years clinical experience as a Chartered Psychologist, Chartered Scientist and Registered Nurse. Prof Gournay also has extensive managerial experience in the UK National Health Service (NHS).

The 12 ECRs (I’ve met most of them) are the lifeblood of CREMS. These postdocs have a level of enthusiasm and comradeship that I’ve truly never encountered before. These ECRs are the next generation of researchers and will be senior authors on high impact papers and will make a real difference in comorbidity and other areas of healthcare. Because they will be well-rounded researchers (I’ll use that phrase again) some will wish to apply their skills in other areas.

So let’s start at the beginning. ECRs start their trajectory after completion of a PhD. However, there are still many who believe that a PhD is the end of one’s education. Indeed, many of the world’s leading researchers have received no formal education and training following completion of their doctorate.

Let’s examine this position in a critical way by looking at someone who has obtained a good first degree in psychology and gone on to undertake a PhD. How well qualified will that person be for a future in research? Although is there is some agreement about what constitutes a reasonable first degree in
psychology, we all know that different university courses place more emphasis on some subjects than others and thus graduates may have various levels of expertise in experimental design and research methods and other relevant topics. Putting this aside, when our graduate pursues a PhD, there is wide variation in the subject matter and methods used to undertake their research. Thus, to put it at its most brutal, some PhD graduates may have little or no skill insofar as conducting a randomised controlled trial or, conversely, in the use of a qualitative methodology. It appears to me that there is no argument against the proposition that a career in research necessitates a carefully constructed pathway to maturation as a “well-rounded” researcher. What does a well-rounded researcher mean? And how long does it take to get there?

To begin, there is, of course, a need to ensure that post PhD, ECRs need a well-rounded education in research methods and statistics, including not only a range of skills and knowledge concerning randomised controlled trials, but also in the use of qualitative methods and patient reported outcomes. There is increasing recognition that we have paid insufficient attention in the past to the latter two areas. Thus having a good level of skill and knowledge in quantitative methods alone is insufficient for future needs. It is also important that the “well-rounded” researcher has a good grounding in other core disciplines, such as epidemiology, statistics and health economics as well as being able to undertake systematic reviews to the level expected of the Cochrane Collaboration. While this range of skills and knowledge may seem formidable in prospect, this is perhaps only the beginning.

Certainly in the field of comorbidity it is now becoming clear that we need to develop much more research on not only treatments, but also causation, prevention and the translation of knowledge obtained, into the everyday life of people and into clinical services. Thus, each of these streams needs to be considered in the development of this well-rounded person. To the aforementioned subject areas one needs to add skills and knowledge relating to how one applies for research funding and knowledge of the service delivery systems and policy context in which this ECR will work in future. All of these elements must, of course, be provided within the right setting and atmosphere. It is therefore vitally important that all the necessary education and training takes place in an environment where there is plentiful access to mentorship and supervision and to work alongside role models who demonstrate “how to do it.” In addition, let’s not forget that this ECR will be working on their own research

“ECRs need a well rounded education in research methods and statistics, including not only a range of skills and knowledge concerning randomised controlled trials, but also in the use of qualitative methods and patient reported outcomes.”
project, with all the work (design, data collection, analyses etc.) that goes with it. Progressing through this pathway will mean that at some point, after sufficient preparation, these individuals will begin to provide mentorship and supervision to others, by co-supervising PhDs and providing some peer supervision and mentorship to others.

So, how can all this be achieved? I suggest that the reader looks at the *Early Career and Researcher Training Programme Handbook* of CREMS – easily downloadable from the CREMS website. It is worth adding that in addition to what may be provided in-house, there is often a need to access courses in other university departments, or indeed in other institutions. For example, some 20 years ago when struggling with attempts to provide my post-doctoral students with sufficient skills and knowledge, I had to admit that I could not provide everything in house at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neurology in London and decided that I should second my postdocs to another institution, the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, so that they could undertake a world class Master’s programme in epidemiology, or public health (depending on their individual need). It is important to also consider placements outside one’s institution. Indeed, I was able to send one of my ECRs for three months of experience with one Professor Maree Teesson at CREMS! The funding for this opportunity came from the UK Medical Research Council. Many years before this, I accessed some of my own post PhD education on the subject of health economics at the London School of Economics and the University of York. I know that ECRs in CREMS are encouraged to obtain experience further afield, thus providing invaluable opportunities for obtaining new perspectives.

I am of the very firm opinion that, while one can describe all of the necessary components in early career research training, there is a need for each ECR to take part in a process of training needs analysis, with their supervisors. This process will identify particular strengths and weaknesses (we all have some weaknesses!) and then thought may be given to the detail of that particular individual’s preparation.

How long does all this take? In my opinion – and this answer may not please all readers – about six years. I believe that it is impossible to put all this preparation into a three-year post-doctoral fellowship, although I believe that three years suffices as a period to obtain a very good, basic grounding, I am of the firm opinion that completion of an early career fellowship does not mean that one is ready to enter life as a fully-fledged researcher. To take one simple example, learning from the trials and tribulations of obtaining research funding is a process that cannot be shortened. One needs to learn, over a series of funding rounds, how one deals with the rebuttals, resubmissions and indeed the giving up on some proposals when faced with the inevitable. In my view, someone who can call
themselves a “well-rounded researcher” will also have needed to supervise at least a couple of PhDs to completion. Indeed, PhD completions are a prerequisite for progression in the research staff hierarchy.

Fellowships beyond the ECR period are now an essential part of preparation. In this post ECR period, such individuals develop more autonomy, but with ongoing access to support, supervision and mentorship. This period of consolidation is vital in the process of confidence building.

I hope that the reader is not now daunted by the prospect of dealing with this wide array of challenges. However, who told you that it was going to be easy? Easy, no: Fulfilling, exciting, stimulating yes! A passport to standing at the lectern at an international conference in Rome - most definitely!

CREMS is a living example of how ECRs can be nurtured – the awards and recognition of CREMS as a centre of ECR excellence is another story.

“....who told you that it was going to be easy? Easy, no: Fulfilling, exciting, stimulating yes! A passport to standing at the lectern at an international conference in Rome - most definitely!”
It was a sad day when I realised that I had outgrown my organisation system. The most recent one had developed during my PhD, and now was slowly stretching to the seams with the diversity of tasks that came along with being a Postdoc. One day, in the middle of writing a to-do list about my to-do lists, I realised it was time for a change. In the spirit of the Early Career Research by Early Career Researchers edition of the CREMS newsletter, I am sharing some of the strategies that have helped me be a, somewhat, more organised ECR.

1. **Spend time to make time.**

   Time is one of the most precious commodities in research, so it may feel counter-intuitive to take time away from research projects to focus on an organisational strategy. However, spending a few hours to learn a new piece of software, organise a filing system or consolidate all those to-do lists is likely to pay off in future time saving. Setting a regular time to check in with to-do lists and prioritise tasks may also help you reach longer-term goals.
anywhere you have an internet connection. Platforms such as Basecamp and Mavenlink allow you to manage projects online – co-ordinate teams, share content and check in with tasks. Many more organisational apps can be found for Android, Apple and Windows devices. Star ratings, comments or number of downloads provides a nice indicator of social capital to find out what other people are finding useful.

3. Pay attention to time management

It is a terrible cliché, but we all get the same amount of time in the day and we have to use it wisely. Effective time management is also something that I believe is highly personalised. Some people thrive in blocking out whole days for writing, others work best in one hour blocks, and others again work best completing tasks against a timer. Minimising distractions, reducing transitions between different activities and giving up on multi-tasking is likely to improve your efficiency. Turning off notifications from your email and phone during writing times may be enough for some people, others may need a little extra help from programs, such as Cold Turkey, that will lock you out of specified websites for a specified period of time. The Mind Tools website has got some great reading on time management and some worksheets to get you started – just make sure you’re not reading it in your writing time.

4. Work with your natural flow

Part of effective time management is also about being aware of your personal rhythm. Personally, I know my peak thinking times are in the morning, so I try and prioritise tasks that require more focus in the morning.

5. Challenge perfectionism

Perfectionism is the killer of organisation – I may have missed some typos in this article, my phrasing could have been better - but close enough is often good enough. Giving up perfectionism doesn’t mean becoming sloppy, it is about recognising the diminishing returns of increasing levels of minutia. After years of competitive study, perfectionism may be a hard habit to break, but a good place to start is thinking about how important that task is relative to your overall goals. Some great reading on perfectionism, and tips to get you challenging your perfectionism can be found on the Centre for Clinical Interventions website.
6. **Become more systematic**

Every time I have to find an article from my PhD days, I curse myself. Now my files are labelled with “author date and brief title”, however, it is not unusual to find articles I saved straight from downloading called “054634987698%fnsod%fohwr”. Not helpful. Label things clearly, write logs of data analysis, keep syntax files clearly organised. Future You will be very thankful responding to reviewer comments when Present You has made it easy for them.

7. **Have a guiding plan.**

It is often hard to get motivated to stay focused if you have lost sight of the bigger picture. Setting a clear vision for where you want to be in 3 years / the end of your postdoc / when you are “x” years old helps you work backwards to decide what to prioritise this year, month, week and day. There are some great resources for getting you thinking about SMART goals at [MindHealthConnect](#).

8. **Ask a mentor**

Mentoring can be great for finding out how other people organise their time, or problem solve specific challenges. Mentoring may be available through your professional society, workplace or you can even approach someone you admire.
“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success”. Henry Ford

The plan to create a group for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) emerged when Dr Natacha Carragher and I were catching up over lunch back in 2012. We were discussing some of the difficulties and uncertainties that people can face when transitioning from PhD and becoming an independent ECR. There was a general sense of relief and validation amongst us after sharing our thoughts and we decided to reach out to other ECRs to gauge if there was any need for peer support within our group. Sure enough we had a number of colleagues interested and willing to meet on a regular basis.

Fortunately for us at this time, Prof Maree Teesson and A/Prof Kath Mills were also devising ways in which CREMS could support the professional development of the ECR members. After meeting to discuss our ideas we identified objectives, devised a structure and assigned a name for the group - The CREMS ECR Training Program. The Handbook (available online)
“….the aim of the Training Program was to provide ECRs with the necessary training, skills and support to develop as the future leaders of substance use and mental health research.”

Since this time the CREMS ECR Training Program members have met on over 20 occasions, taken part in 5 grant development workshops and have established a number of beneficial academic mentoring partnerships. ECR members located across multiple institutions in both Australia and the US have been able to join meetings via skype and take part in the development activities the Program has to offer. The success of the Training Program has depended substantially on the contribution and positive energy of its members and on the commitment of the two program coordinators. In addition, the combination of top-down and bottom-up support and input has allowed the group to evolve and thrive. Importantly, the CREMS Executive Advisory Board appoints an ECR representative to communicate the interests of all CREMS ECRs to senior CREMS members each year.

Recently the ECR Training Program members worked together over a number of weeks to assist one another in applying for a highly competitive Fellowship scheme. Many observers remarked how unique it was to see such impressive commitment to peer support and generosity, particularly in a climate of limited funding opportunities and strong competition. When the group was forged around 3 years ago it was extremely uplifting and rewarding to see so many ECRs willing to come together to support their peers. Continuing to work together in this fashion has proven to be the key to our success.

______________________________

1 The program was first coordinated by Natacha Carragher (2013) and myself (2013-2014), followed by Lexine Stapinski (2014-2015), Louise Thornton (2015-2016) and Louise Mewton (2016).
Changing fields

The relatively long(ish) and somewhat rambling road

In my workplace, there is an almost universally linear relationship between A and C, where A represents an undergraduate university degree; B represents a post-graduate degree, and C represents an early career research fellow position in the same field. My career however, has been somewhat different. Although I seem to have successfully made the leap from A to C via B, I also changed fields at point B, from criminology to public health. Figure 1 illustrates this dynamic.

Impressively, the majority of my colleagues have attained early career researcher positions in similar fields and subjects areas as those in which they became experts in their postgraduate studies. I however, strayed from the norm, and after completing my PhD in criminology (where my thesis focused on responses to volatile substance misuse), I was very lucky to land a role at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC). Although I loved the work, the language was completely different. I couldn’t do a chi square test, I didn’t know who (or what) peak bodies were, and in effect, I started...
from scratch as an early career researcher in a completely new field. The research at NDARC was predominantly quantitative, which was completely at odds with my qualitative background and prior research experience, the key stakeholders were different, and even the conventions surrounding authoring and co-authoring papers was entirely different.

Changing fields was a considerable challenge: I had two published papers when I began, and I began to panic when I attended workshops and seminars that discussed ‘publish or perish’ metrics, grant funding, and fellowships. At the time, I was coordinating a very large and complex project that left me no time to write papers or funding applications – I was already working after hours on project administration and can clearly remember the anxiety and stress I felt at the thought of being left behind. I watched people who were awarded their PhDs after me be promoted above my level, leap ahead in terms of publications and grant funding, and I felt as though I were failing.

Figure 1: Trajectories of typical early career researchers and me

However, the large complex project ended and I was able to lead and contribute to publications from that study. I had been working hard to gain experience and work towards establishing a reputation that would assist me to attract my own research funding. My hard work began to pay off: I was fortunate to obtain government funding to develop and translate evidence-based resources for clinicians, and I obtained an early career researcher fellowship from the Society of Mental Health Research. Although I am still behind if I compare myself to my peers who completed their PhDs around the same time as me (in terms of publications and grant funding), I am beginning to catch up. The challenge of switching fields has definitely been worth it for me: I love my work, and I am passionate about my research. It is incredibly rewarding to feel as though my work is contributing to the evidence-base surrounding people with co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug use disorders.
This morning I spent about an hour on Facebook and Twitter, during lunch I went for a walk to catch Pokémon and this afternoon I’ll probably spend a good chunk of time playing with apps on my phone, and check back in on Facebook and Twitter! It might sound like I have a horrible work ethic, but all of these activities are actually an important part of my job!

I’m playing with apps for a review of freely available, smoking cessation apps that I am writing and I was catching Pokémon to make sure that I understand the ‘ins and outs’ of the PokemonGo game to help inform a new research project. Though probably most importantly, I was on Facebook and Twitter to build my reputation as an emerging leader in the fields of co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders and e-health, and to engage a global community with my own, and other’s research. -- Well actually my goal was to get the UNSW twitter account to retweet me – but you get the idea.
I see social media as a really useful, ever expanding, toolkit that can be used to help conduct research and build your career. Social media can be used to efficiently recruit participants (see our recent review of health research recruiting via Facebook) and even deliver interventions. Engaging with social media is also a free way in which you can: disseminate your own research to a global audience; network with peers and experts in a quick, simple, non-confronting way; participate, and help to shape, current discussions in your field; and help to bridge the gap between academia and the public by engaging the broader community with your work.

I now manage a number of social media accounts including my own professional Twitter account (@Louise_Thornton) and blog, the CREMS social media channels (Twitter: @CREComorbidity, Facebook) and those of the Society for Mental Health Research (Twitter: @SMHR, Facebook). I find that I am spending more and more time on social media sites during my workday. While I won’t deny that sometimes managing these accounts can be quite time-consuming, and many people might think spending time on social media is time that could be better spent writing papers or grants, I find that most of the time I spend using social media for work purposes to be incredibly valuable. Not only does managing these accounts help me to keep up to date with recent work in my field, I believe that it has significantly increased my professional profile. For example, at the recent Society for Behavioural Medicine (SBM) Conference in Washington D.C. I was responsible for the most engagement with the conference hashtag on twitter. Not only did I win free registration to attend the 2017 SBM conference, more than once during that conference I was recognized from the live twitter feed the conference organizers had displayed on screens throughout the venue. As a result I was able to make a number of new connections with international researchers.

Promoting my work on twitter may also help to improve my ‘traditional’ metrics of success. Research suggests that the odds of an article being highly cited are significantly increased by a mention in social media (Knight (2014) Transplantation. 98, 490-496). I also believe that in the near future having a strong digital presence will become an essential part of being a successful academic.

So for all these reasons I’m going to continue to make time during my normal work day to engage with social media, build my profile and share high-quality research in my area. I hope to see on there! #SocialMediaRocks

“I see social media as a really useful, ever expanding, toolkit that can be used to help conduct research and build your career. ”
Finding your niche

Since I started working in a predominantly research role a few years ago I have noticed that researchers are often (particularly when applying for funding) asked to provide a short statement summarising our expertise and role on any potential project. Indeed, we spend years trying to develop these one or two statements (and they are constantly changing), but they seem particularly important during the early career stage when we are trying to develop a track record, establish an independent program of research, and make ourselves known as an expert in “something”. As part of this “For ECRs by ECRs” section I thought it might be helpful (for myself and others) to reflect on what my one or two statements are and how I have developed them over the past few years.

My typical statement generally goes like this: “Dr Sunderland’s research focuses on the application of novel statistical techniques to address salient issues in epidemiology, classification, and measurement of psychopathology”. Broadly
speaking, I have become known as someone who is good at statistics and has expertise in various procedures that seek to answer questions about the nature of mental health, substance use, and comorbidity. So... how did I get here?

Most of the formal training in statistics was through a Bachelor of Psychology that contained compulsory courses in statistics each year that everyone seemed to hate (although I actually enjoyed them, which is probably one reason why I continued to learn and apply new statistical techniques in my research roles). It wasn’t until I started my first research job at the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression that I really started to learn and embrace statistics as part of my field of research. I was working under Prof Gavin Andrews and A/Prof Tim Slade who were instrumental in the development of the 1997 and 2007 Australian National Surveys of Mental Health and Wellbeing, was doing required analysing very large and complicated surveys using methods that I had never heard of before. Consequently, I spent many hours reading textbooks, journal articles, and websites, as well as watching online videos and lectures and meeting with people who may have used a particular statistical technique in order to learn as much as I could. This inevitably led me down a path where I could find and read about new and emerging techniques to answer interesting research questions that I wouldn’t have normally come across.

Despite all of this reading, I feel that I was able to gain the required expertise (and publish/present work along the way) by applying various statistical techniques in large psychiatric epidemiological datasets that were publicly available. More recently, I read an article by Dan Blazer in JAMA Psychiatry that really struck a chord with me. He discussed the many advantages of secondary data analysis for junior researchers to build expertise in psychiatric research and statistical methods. This option is becoming even more attractive as research funds to collect original data are becoming scarce and online repositories provide easy access to rich datasets. It is also one option that members of the Centre for Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use have embraced for a long time and consistently encouraged among junior researchers and PhD students who wish to develop their expertise in a particular method or topic.

So the take home message for early career researchers who wish to gain more expertise in statistical methods and finding a niche in a particular area is to read as much as you can, gain access to a publicly available dataset, sit down in front of a computer with a good statistics package (SPSS, SAS, R), and try to be as patient as possible!
Last time I wrote for the CREMS newsletter, I had just finished my PhD. I worked for another year at the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University as a Postdoc, where I was surrounded by wonderful colleagues and friends. It was hard to leave, but by the time you read this, I will have been working as a Postdoc at the University of Minnesota in the USA for a year.

It’s difficult to summarise what has been such a rich, challenging, and rewarding experience. So what better way to cram lots of disjointed information into a short space than to write the literary masterpiece that is a listicle? I give you: 7 Pros and Cons of My Time as a Postdoc in the USA.

Pro: I get to work with Prof Bob Krueger, which is great fun! He’s my primary mentor here, and his work on the structure of psychopathology was the basis of my PhD. I had intermittent contact with Bob over the course of my PhD, and when I was in the US for a conference in 2013 I flew to Minneapolis for the day to have lunch and chat about the statistical models I was
Using. This connection with Prof Krueger was a big part of why I was offered the job at UMN. At the moment we’re working to understand the strengths and limitations of different statistical methods for modelling comorbidity.

Con: My salary nearly halved, compared to working as a Postdoc in Australia. Since my position is a Training Fellowship—a T32 grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse—I’m paid a ‘subsistence-level salary’ (seriously). It’s fabled to be a test to narrow down applicants to the true of heart. Combined with a surprisingly expensive move to the US, taking the position has not been great for our bank balance.

Pro: I’m surrounded by people who challenge my thinking. In particular, the three other postdocs on the T32 grant have very different backgrounds to me: an MD, lab-based preclinical (rat) research, and community-driven collaborative research. As a result, we have contrasting perspectives and ideas, and this has helped all of us to see our research in a new light. We’re using our complementary research strengths to collaborate on a project about the psychosocial outcomes for adults with and without heightened sensitivity to environmental influences.

Con: My PhD training in Australia didn’t equip me for the US job market for academic positions in Psychology. Since I don’t have clinical training, I’ve been advised to either retrain as a clinician, or plan to return to Australia. This wasn’t a particularly difficult decision for me! I’ll be home in mid-2017.

Pro: It’s easier to make new connections being here in person. Prof Krueger has introduced me to some amazing people—for example, I was delighted to be invited by Dr Roman Kotov, Associate Professor at Stony Brook University, to work with the Hierarchic Taxonomy of Psychopathology (HiTOP) Consortium. I’ve also been able to make connections in the hallways at UMN, at department meetings, and at conferences. These relationships have led to some great collaborative ventures that I would have missed out on otherwise.

Con: We’ve also missed out by being away from home. In particular, my husband Pearse has made some big professional sacrifices to support our move to the US. We’ve also missed births, weddings, engagements, and birthdays while we’ve been away, which has been difficult.

Pro: The positives outweigh the negatives (It’s worth it!). I’m working hard to make the most of my time here. Within two months of arriving, I’d had more opportunities than I’d hoped for from the full two years! I’m working with the leading researchers in my field, I have 100% protected research time, and have never been more productive.

I’m the definition of a homebody, and never expected to do a Postdoc overseas. My PhD supervisor A/Prof Andrew Baillie planted the seed, and encouraged me to ‘spread my wings.’ I’m so glad I did!
RESOURCES
FOR THE PUBLIC, PROFESSIONALS AND RESEARCHERS

The CREMS Early Career Researcher Training Program Handbook provides full details of our ECR Program and profiles of all our early career researchers.

The CREMS Student Research Opportunities Handbook gives details on the supervision opportunities available at CREMS. Thinking of embarking on a research career? This is the place to start.

The Society for Mental Health Research has a page dedicated to ECR resources, including training resources and events, websites of interest, job opportunities and funding opportunities.

The Early- and Mid-Career Researcher forum at the Australian Academy of Science is the national voice of Australia's emerging scientists, representing researchers who are up to 15 years post-PhD, irrespective of their professional appointment.
I was in year 10 when my science teacher pulled me aside, concerned. I was ranked 110 out of 113 science students. With a worried look on his face, he asked, “when will you get your act together, Jack?”

I immediately replied, “I’ll never work as a scientist, so what’s the point?”

Little did I know what journey lay ahead.

With my mediocre HSC marks, I scraped into a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Newcastle. Still with no idea of what to study, I did what any rational person would do….pick the subjects that my parents did. One of them was Introduction to Psychology.

My first class saw me hidden at the back of the room, shocked by the language of the other students. The words they were using seemed so foreign to me, I considered dragging a dictionary to class. As I contemplated whether
university was for me, a lecturer of mine made a point that I still remember today.

“Don’t try and make yourself sound smart, make the reader feel smart,” he had said.

With that statement still burnt into my brain today, I am equipped with the understanding that translation is fundamental when presenting information. I no longer question whether I sound smart enough, but rather consider whom I am communicating with and the best way of explaining it to them.

Although my first two years of university yielded average grades, I found psychology to be fascinating. I transferred to a Bachelor of Psychology in my third year, but I knew I needed my results to vastly improve if I were to dig deeper down the rabbit hole.

I soon discovered that surrounding myself with bright and curious students would give me the upper hand. Not only could I discuss the subject matter with them, but they also served as a benchmark that I could aspire to reach.

As three years of psychology courses went by, my enthusiasm for clinical psychology grew. Being attracted to that hands-on process of helping people, I favoured the idea of being a clinician. I certainly did not share this feeling with research however, finding myself feeling a strong sense of sympathy for those in academia. This all changed once I entered my fourth year of psychology.

My honours year was off to a shaky start when I wasn’t given my first preference in research areas. I felt that there was a big difference between evolutionary psychology and psychophysiology. Apprehensively, I sunk my teeth into the relevant content and started to develop an unexpected passion for research. I began investigating the effect of inter-stimulus interval on neural activity using EEG (Electroencephalography). It wasn’t just the hands on testing of participants that drew my interest, but the challenge to translate various concepts. Despite my new appetite for research, I searched for any experience that would help direct me in a clinical pathway. What I found, however, would also improve my opinion of research.

I was luckily given the chance to volunteer with Central Coast Health as a research assistant. The project I was involved in focused on the effects of synthetic and non-synthetic cannabis. My role was to interview people seeking treatment for their cannabis use. As an interviewer, I was required to gain quantitative and qualitative information regarding drug use and mental health. I found this experience to be extremely valuable. I felt like I was getting a grasp of what a clinical setting would be like, while in my mind I was emphasising the importance of extracting good data.

Midway through 2016 I was given the opportunity to join the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use (CREMS) team as a research assistant under A/Prof Tim Slade.
Tim assisted in my transition from tertiary education into employment by providing effective support whenever necessary. I had heard time and time again by university graduates that the workforce is nothing like what you study at university. With that in mind, my introduction into NDARC sure felt like an abnormality because I felt like my degree prepared me well. I was involved in a number of projects such as Climate Schools Prevention and Climate Schools Combined (CSC). One of the reasons I favoured clinical over research is the opportunity to help people. These large cohort prevention studies have since made me realise that you can help people just as much behind a computer screen.

With some experience as a research assistant under my belt, I was presented with a full-time contract. Under Dr Christina Marel, I became committed to the dissemination of the revised National Comorbidity Guidelines. We are currently in the process of creating an online training program, contributing in a capacity that I never once imagined. Chris has only reinforced my personal mantra of surrounding yourself with brilliant minds. She constantly makes me feel like a valued member of the team, and does an excellent job at getting the very best out of me.

When I was asked to write this spotlight, I wasn’t too sure that I would have anything to offer the reader. However, with the theme of the newsletter being ‘foundations’, I had a few ideas.

For senior staff, I hope this read may help you recall your own pathway as a professional: decisions you have made, and avenues you avoided. It may also give you a new perspective of those new staff members and their progression throughout.

For junior staff, I hope it may offer optimism in times of uncertainty, or perhaps just an understanding of fellow colleagues.

And as for me? This spotlight has made me realise that I’ve strapped myself in, and I’m very keen for the ride ahead.
UNSW Postgraduate information evening

Dr Chris Marel and Dr Katrina Champion were on site for the UNSW Postgraduate Information Evening in May representing the Centre for Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use. It was a wonderful evening filled with discussion of interesting research ideas and potential PhD topics. Academics working at the Centre are always interested in hearing from potential students who wish to enrol in a PhD or research Masters on the topic of mental health and substance use.

The Centre is a vibrant and stimulating centre that offers excellent research training and good prospects for a career in research. If you would like more information about undertaking postgraduate research degree with us then please free to look at our student handbook or contact any academic directly.

Special issue: Smoking and other cardiovascular risk behaviours among people with mental health and substance use disorders

Professor Amanda Baker and Professor Jill Williams will be serving as guest co-editors for a special issue in the *Journal of Dual Diagnosis*.

This issue will feature articles that focus on cardiovascular health risk behaviours among people with mental health and substance use problems. The deadline for submission has closed and the special issue will be published shortly. We look forward to reading about this important and timely topic.
Webinars

We have the following upcoming webinars:

- August 2016: Assessing with efficient: advances in the measurement of mental and substance use disorders. Presented by Dr Matthew Sunderland.

Previous webinars are now available to watch on demand. Our last two webinars held on May 26th by A/Prof Tim Slade and 15th June by Ms Siobhan Lawler are currently available to watch on demand. Go to www.comorbidity.edu.au/training/webinars for more information and to watch previous webinars.

Congratulations to A/Prof Frances Kay-Lambkin

Congratulations to our Director of Translation Research A/Prof Frances Kay Lambkin who has recently taken up an ongoing Associate Professor position at the School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Newcastle. Frances is one of Australia’s leading translational researchers in the field of e-mental health therapy for comorbid mental and substance use disorders. We look forward to seeing some of the amazing work by Frances and her team in the future.

UNSW Academic Promotions

Congratulations to CREMS members Dr Louise Mewton, Dr Lexine Stapinski, and Dr Matthew Sunderland who were promoted to the level of Senior Research Fellow in the recent round of UNSW academic promotions. This promotion recognises the important contribution to research, education, and leadership at UNSW.

World Congress of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies

The 8th World Congress of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (WCBCT) was held on the 22-25 June 2016 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. CREMS had a significant contingent attend this conference with fourteen members presenting their cutting-edge research on the prevention, treatment, and epidemiology of mental health and substance use disorders. The conference was an amazing couple of days packed with exciting and novel research on behavioural and cognitive therapies from experts around the world. A keynote presentation was given by Prof Max Birchwood, chief investigator of the CREMS, on the topic of “Does CBT for psychosis have a future?” and a plenary presentation by Dr Nickie Newton, CREMS director of prevention, on the topic of “Addiction prevention in youth”.

NDARC Symposium

This year’s NDARC symposium will be held on 12th September at the John Niland Scientia Conference and Events Centre at UNSW in Sydney. This symposium will feature presentations by Prof Maree Teesson on evaluating novel approaches to prevention for adolescents and two breakout sessions on school-based prevention for substance use and a workshop on managing co-occurring mental and substance use disorders. Register here.
UPCOMING CONFERENCES

NDARC ANNUAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM
JOHN NILAND SCIENTIA BUILDING UNSW, SYDNEY
12 SEPTEMBER

HUMANS AND MACHINES: A QUEST FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH
JOHN NILAND SCIENTIA BUILDING UNSW, SYDNEY
15 SEPTEMBER

APSAD SCIENTIFIC ALCOHOL AND DRUG CONFERENCE
FOUR POINTS BY SHERIDAN, DARLIN HARBOUR, SYDNEY
30 OCTOBER-2 NOVEMBER

38TH ANNUAL SMHR CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY, SYDNEY
7-9 DECEMBER
**PUBLICATIONS**


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