

PhD outline

Name: Mollie Price

PhD title: Understanding and addressing the psychosocial support needs of caregivers of people with comorbid cancer and dementia.

Mode of study: Full-time and Graduate Teaching Assistant

Your supervisory team: Dr Laura Ashley; Professor Claire Surr; Professor Brendan Gough

Background to your PhD:

Recent research has begun to examine the experiences and outcomes of people with comorbid cancer and dementia (CCD), who are diagnosed at later stages; receive less treatment; have poorer survival rates; and experience more complications from treatment compared to people without dementia (Hopkinson, Milton, King & Edwards, 2016). Family caregivers of people with CCD play a vital supportive role, but this may be particularly challenging and burdensome, and may adversely impact their own health and wellbeing. However, the experiences and needs of carers of people with CCD are currently overlooked in the literature.

The aims and objectives of the PhD:

- 1) To conduct a scoping review of the literature to determine the extent and nature of research activity; current knowledge; and knowledge gaps on the experiences and needs of carers of people with multimorbidities.
- 2) To conduct a qualitative interview study with caregivers of people with comorbid cancer and dementia, focused on understanding their experiences, the unique challenges they face caring for someone with cancer and dementia, and highlighting their psychosocial support needs and how and by whom these might be best met.
- 3) To develop a psychosocial intervention and/or service improvement that could potentially address an important unmet psychosocial support need(s) and improve an aspect of carers' wellbeing; and to conduct a feasibility test for this intervention, focusing on the implementation, acceptability and initial perceived value and impact.

Your study design and methods:

Study 1: The literature review followed a methodological framework for conducting a scoping study proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The analysis involved both a descriptive numerical summary and a thematic analysis.

Study 2: The qualitative study involves one-on-one interviews (both face-to-face and telephone) using a semi-structured interview schedule. Participant eligibility criteria includes aged 18+; can speak fluent English; and are providing (or within the last 5 years have provided) unpaid care to someone with both cancer and dementia. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is the chosen method of analysis for this study.

Study 3: TBC

What the contribution to knowledge will be:

Informal carers of people with comorbid cancer and dementia are a growing population, and their experiences are yet to be explored in the literature. This is the first research to examine and address the psychosocial support needs of caregivers of people with CCD. Addressing a particular unmet need of these carers with a psychosocial intervention/service improvement may improve caregiver

health and wellbeing, improve patient outcomes and quality of life, and decrease economic costs to the healthcare system.

In addition, multimorbidity is currently a public health concern, and exploring co-occurring illnesses (as opposed to illnesses in isolation) is an increasing research interest. This is reflected in funding streams, for example, the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) had a recent call-out for research into multimorbidities. Thus, this project is being conducted at a time when multimorbidity research is considered particularly important and topical, by both other researchers and the Department of Health.

How you plan to disseminate the PhD:

I intend to publish each of the individual studies in appropriate peer-reviewed journals (e.g. Psychology & Health; Psycho-Oncology). I also intend to present the findings as posters and oral presentations at appropriate academic conferences such as British Psychosocial Oncology Society and BPS Division of Health Psychology.

