

Paul Polani Lecture: The impact of language disorders on mental health and wellbeing

Prof Courtenay Norbury, Professor of Developmental Language & Communication Disorders, University College London

This presentation will highlight the potential mechanisms that explain the well-established link between language disorder and adverse social, emotional, and behavioural outcome, using data from SCALES, a 10-year longitudinal study of language development and disorder in over 500 children from school entry through the transition to secondary school. The take home message is that early language interventions could helpfully target language for social and emotional development as a preventative measure. At the same time, we need to develop more accessible 'talking therapies' and verbal strategies that promote good mental health.

Healthy Parent Carers: peer-led group-based health promotion programme to improve health and wellbeing parent carers of disabled children

Prof Chris Morris, Professor of Child Health Research, University of Exeter

Parent carers of disabled children are at greater risk of poor physical and mental health. This has consequences for their children and families as well as health and social care. However their health needs are too often overlooked and unaddressed by health services. Healthy Parent Carers is a public health promotion programme designed to improve health and wellbeing of parent carers by promoting empowerment, confidence, and resilience. There is a desperate need for paediatricians and allied health professionals working with families with disabled children to be mindful of the physical and mental health of parent carers, and in the interests of child health to advocate for greater access to health promotion.

"I am the only man in the room." The psycho-social experiences of fathers caring for children diagnosed as autistic

Dr Louise Cooper, Lead Children's Learning Disability Nurse, Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust

Fathers are often perceived as secondary parents with their support needs being poorly understood. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has highlighted the differential needs of fathers in comparison to mothers. Creating supportive spaces for fathers was developed collaboratively following this research. A fathers 'walk and talk' group was set up locally in providing peer support for fathers offering a non-intimidating environment where conversations can flow naturally.

Parent Carer Trauma: Insights for Transforming Practice

Rachel Wright, parent and Founder of Born at the Right Time

This talk will explore how recognising and responding to parent carer trauma can transform the way professionals support families. Rooted in lived experience and informed by research, Rachel Wright offers practical, actionable steps to reduce systems-generated trauma from the perspective of nurse and parent carer. Participants will leave with clearer insight into how to foster more compassionate, collaborative, and trauma-informed practice.

Prevalence of mental health conditions in adults with CP

Dr Jennifer Ryan, Senior Lecturer, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and Director, Cerebral Palsy Lifespan Health and Well-being (CP-Life) Research Centre

The objectives of this talk are to:

1. Describe the prevalence of mental health difficulties and mental disorders among young people and adults with cerebral palsy
 2. Outline factors that contribute to development of mental health difficulties
 3. Illustrate the experience of adults with cerebral palsy and mental health difficulties
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Not Overdiagnosed, Overexposed: Addressing health inequalities to improve mental health and wellbeing

Dr Guddi Singh, Consultant in Neurodevelopmental & Social Paediatrics, Broadcaster, and Founder of the Wellbeing and Health Action Movement (WHAM)

In this keynote, I'll argue that many children are not "overdiagnosed" so much as **overexposed** – to poverty, unstable housing, racism, school pressure and an unforgiving digital world – and that paediatrics too often individualises this structurally-produced distress. Drawing on clinical work, the BBC Radio 4 series, *Three Ages of Child*, and co-production projects WHAM and *Powering Up*, I'll explore how we as paediatricians and systems can move from treating symptoms in isolated young people to changing the conditions that shape their mental health and wellbeing. By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe how key social determinants (poverty, housing, racism, school and digital environments) shape patterns of mental health and distress in children and young people, including how these impacts are unequally distributed.
2. Recognise how paediatric practice and service design can unintentionally individualise structurally-produced distress – for example through narrow diagnostic framings, language and pathways that overlook context.
3. Critically reflect on their own role, and that of paediatric services more broadly, in either reinforcing or challenging health inequalities in children's mental health – including the tension between "overdiagnosed" and "overexposed".

4. Apply practical tools for bringing a social-determinants and co-production lens into everyday work (e.g. “structural history-taking”, youth voice, partnership with schools and community services) to help shift from treating symptoms in individuals to changing the conditions shaping children’s mental health and wellbeing.
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Integrating Psychological Care into Acute Paediatrics: Promoting wellbeing beyond the bedside for hospitalised children and young people

Dr Isabel Paz, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

This session explores the psychological impact of acute hospitalisation on children and young people, with a focus on integrating mental health care into paediatric practice. It considers the emotional needs of patients, the effects on families, and the wellbeing of clinicians. Practical strategies and multidisciplinary approaches will be discussed to support holistic care in acute settings.

Mental health of children with complex neurodisabilities: the importance of meaningful activity and participation

*Annemarie Sims, Occupational Therapist, Evelina Children's Hospital; and
Dr Ashley Liew, Consultant Paediatric Neuropsychiatrist, Evelina Children's Hospital*

A clinically focused presentation from a Child Psychiatrist and Occupational Therapist working in a multidisciplinary neurodevelopmental and neurodisability service, to consider how meaningful activity, participation and a focus on functional skills, helps support the mental health of children and young people with a range of complex neurodisabilities.

The Lucy Project – drop in service for CYP with mild to moderate psychological difficulties

*Dr Steve Jones, Principal Clinical Psychologist, Sheffield Children’s Hospital; and
Dr Sophie Bennett, Reader in Clinical Psychology, Kings College London*

The Lucy Project is a drop-in psychological support service based within paediatric hospitals, designed to offer rapid access to early intervention for children and young people with psychological difficulties. The service enables timely brief assessment, psychoeducation, signposting and low-intensity intervention without referral or waiting lists. This presentation will describe the model’s development and implementation, illustrate patterns of use and early outcomes, and highlight what we have learned about delivering flexible, accessible psychological support alongside routine paediatric care. By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the structure and purpose of a paediatric-hospital-based drop-in mental health service for CYP with mild–moderate difficulties.

2. Understand how embedding psychological support in paediatric settings improves accessibility and reduces barriers to early help.
3. Summarise early service outcomes, including patterns of presentation and engagement.
5. Identify practical considerations and challenges in implementing open-access psychological support within paediatric pathways.