

# NIHR Bristol Nutrition BRU Newsletter



I hope that everybody had a good Easter break.

I would like to thank Richard Hocking for all his work over the last two years and to welcome Vanessa Marshall who has taken over as unit manager and Rhona Beynon who is our first BRU intern. I would also like to congratulate Georgia on the birth of her son and Lucy on her marriage.

I find it hard to believe we have only been open for two years. We now have 50 approved projects and results and papers are already coming out of this work. Thank you to everyone for all their hard work.

Despite my decision to replace the biscuits we had before seminars with a fruit box (a decision that was not universally popular!) I still believe this is not only an exciting and stimulating place to work but enjoyable too. The results of our recent staff survey on life balance and training support this as do the pictures and report of our recent night out ten pin bowling. I am looking forward to hosting our BRU cocktail party at the end of the month (that feels like it is turning into an annual event). Hopefully this

time I have managed to avoid major competing events such as Wimbledon and Glastonbury and perhaps we will be lucky and the sun will shine too!

I was delighted to be awarded an NIHR senior investigator award which I think says as much about the great people I have the privilege of working and collaborating with as it does about me.

I hope everybody has a great summer.



Farewell drinks for Richard at The Green Man in Kingsdown, Bristol

## Chewing gum and recovery from colorectal surgery

By Charlotte Atkinson  
Research Fellow in Nutrition



Surgery to the abdomen (belly) can affect people in a number of ways. These include effects on bowel habit such as an absence of passing wind or faeces because the bowels have temporarily stopped working. This condition is called ileus. It can cause pain and discomfort and may result in a longer hospital stay. Early feeding after surgery can stimulate bowel movement, but it can also have side-effects such as vomiting. Small studies have looked at whether chewing gum can 'trick' the body into thinking it is being fed and improve recovery. We conducted a large study to see whether chewing sugar free gum four times a day during the first five days after colorectal surgery reduces the length of hospital stay or has an effect on factors such as bowel function,

abdominal pain, and nausea.

We enrolled 412 patients, half were randomly assigned to usual care plus chewing gum and half to usual care alone as the comparison group. Data from participants and their medical notes were collected during the first 5 days after surgery, and we collected information on date of hospital discharge.

After surgery, there were no important differences between treatment groups in length of hospital stay, or other outcomes including day of first bowel movement, day solid food consumption resumed, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and patient's overall health.

Although some small studies suggested a benefit of chewing gum after a colorectal resection on bowel function and possibly a reduced length of hospital stay, findings from our preliminary analyses did not support this. We collected a lot of information from participants and their medical records, and we will use data from this study to try and answer other important questions such as why some people start eating soon after their operation whilst others do not, and what effect early feeding may have on recovery.

## Book Group, 'Nutritional Epidemiology'

By Andy Ness

Spurred on by the success of our epidemiological and qualitative reading groups I decided (unwisely perhaps) that we should tackle the third edition of Nutritional Epidemiology by Walter Willett.

This was not a challenge for the faint hearted – 500 pages in three months! The book is scholarly and full of information but it is not an easy read and the layout seems to compound this. More pictures, case studies and summaries as bullet points would have been really welcome. Also I felt the latest edition had been edited

when what it really needed was a more comprehensive overhaul. In my opinion some of the chapters such as the one on energy adjustment are excellent but others such as the chapter on physical activity let the book down.

Attendance was (understandably?) patchy so I am not sure how many people read the book from cover to cover (apart from me – honest!). But perhaps this is not a book to be read in its entirety. Rather it should be seen as a reference book to be consulted as required.

Other members of the Executive are going to lead some reading in their subject areas later in the year and we are discussing the possibility of running a reading group in systematic reviews as well. And for those of you who like fiction I would recommend Stoner by John Williams and the Persephone book of short stories. Easier reads I promise.

## 2 day NVivo 10 workshop — more exciting than it sounds!

By Vaneesha Short, PhD student

Back in January, I found myself travelling to the University of Surrey, less than thrilled at the prospect of spending the next 48 hours learning how to use the NVivo 10 computer software.

However, despite the misgiving dreary name '2 day NVivo 10 workshop', much to my surprise and that of my fellow NVivo

# Training



tutees, I found that this course was actually one of the most interesting that I have attended as part of my PhD! The tutor was charismatic and enthusiastic, and the course content itself was concise, comprehensible and aimed at researchers like myself, who were in the early stages of

data collection. The course was well structured, yet flexible enough to cater for individual needs.

By the end of the course, I felt confident in using NVivo, and actually came away having started coding my own dataset. I would strongly recommend this course at the University of Surrey – it's not only taught me how to use the software (with lots of tips and tricks), but has also enthused me to get cracking with coding my data!

## Laura Birch to join Research Ethics Committee

By Laura Birch, Research Dietician



A Research Ethics Committee is an independent committee of the Health Research Authority (HRA), whose task it is to consider the ethics of proposed research projects which will involve human participants and which will take place within the NHS. Healthcare research cannot proceed without the approval of the REC. The key duty of a REC is to protect the interests of research participants whilst at the same time facilitating ethical research. Each REC consists of a minimum of seven and a maximum of 18 volunteers including Lay and Expert members. I was appointed as an Expert member of the Frenchay REC on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014 and participated in my first REC review meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> April. As a member of the REC I will be required to undertake preparatory reading of the research proposal applications prior to each meeting and then work with the rest of the committee to review the applications and give an opinion on whether the research is ethical.

*"A Day In The Life of A Research Associate..."*

By Chris Penfold,  
Research Associate in Statistics



"I'm a Research Associate in statistics, one of three 'core' RAs who specialise in certain research methods. I'm involved in several BRU projects and teach undergraduate dental students. I try to keep normal office hours but will stay late rather than take work home. My day always starts with checking emails followed

by giving any comments/edits needed by colleagues. Once that's done I tackle the important jobs for the project I'm working on that day. This varies from planning with colleagues how to run a new project through to analysing the collected data for final publications. If I'm teaching, since I'm fairly new to it, this takes up half a day for a ninety minute session. Managing a diverse and unpredictable workload can be challenging, but it's great to be involved in a range of really interesting studies. I'm also finally coming to terms with the replacement of our biscuit tray with a fruit box..."

## Staff changes at the BRU

### Welcome... Vanessa Marshall New BRU Manager

"I come to the Nutrition BRU from the Drug Safety Research Unit in Southampton where I had worked for nearly 9 years, first as a clinical research fellow, then as a Study Manager and Senior Clinical Research Manager, part of the Senior Management team.

Having qualified as a doctor in London in 1997, I have also worked in William Harvey Hospital in Kent, Derriford Hospital in Plymouth and Weston General Hospital, Weston-super-Mare.

After an initially quite nomadic lifestyle, with quite a lot of house moves over the years we are now fortunately happily settled as a family in Bristol and I am very excited to be living and working in such a lovely city. My husband is a consultant rheumatologist at the BRI. We have two sons Thomas and Alastair who are 15 and 12 respectively. Outside the 9-5 of work, having two active, sporty and outdoor loving boys keeps me busy as do my dog, two cats, two rabbits, a pond full of fish, a woodland garden and a 200 hundred year old house!

I look forward to meeting, working with and getting to know you all. A big personal thank you to Richard for all the work he has done before me (big shoes to fill!), and thank you to the rest of the unit for your warm welcome. I look forward to a new, challenging and exciting chapter at the BRU."

### And... Rhona Beynon BRU Intern

"I joined the Nutrition BRU at the beginning of February after graduating with an MSc in Biomedical Science Research at Bristol. I think I am a familiar face to most of the people in the unit now, and I thank you all for your very warm welcome.

The purpose of my internship is to gain as much experience as I can in scientific research administration and clinical trial management. As part of this, I am working with Research, Enterprise and Development (RED) where I am trying to get a grasp of all of the ethics and governance implications of studies which bamboozle everybody at the time of their IRAS applications. I am further helping to support the set-up of the new Bristol Biobank which is being created in the Eye hospital to meet the needs of several research centres, including the Nutrition BRU.

Within the Nutrition BRU itself I am already involved in a number of different projects and ongoing research activities. My work placement is for the year, so I look forward to getting stuck into many more assignments, training programmes and work nights out!"



### Farewell... Richard Hocking Former BRU Manager

"As many of you know, I will be leaving my role as Bristol Nutrition BRU Manager at the end of March to take up a new post as Manager for the new CLAHRC West. My two years here in the BRU have been both enjoyable and challenging, and I shall miss the whole team of staff and students very much. My successor, Vanessa Marshall, has been appointed and will take up the role from the 1st April. I wish her every success and hope that her time with the BRU will be as fulfilling as mine."

## Public Engagement

By Rachel Perry  
Systematic Reviewer and Unit Lead  
for Engagement



The unit is committed to public engagement. My role as Unit Lead for engagement was to write a policy to guide engagement activity within the unit. The policy outlines work in four key areas:

- Supporting University strategy and activities
- Providing staff training
- Leading engagement activities
- Monitoring and reviewing engagement activities

This policy can be found at [www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation/bristol-nutrition-bru/engagement/](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation/bristol-nutrition-bru/engagement/)

## The BRU is feeling fruity!

By Katie Berryman  
Trials Coordinator

Recently, the BRU decided to practice what we preach and introduce a fruit box to the office. As a “nutritional unit” we felt we should replace the



traditional combo of hobnobs, bourbons and digestives offered at our seminars, with a selection of organic fruit grown locally, all packaged up in an authentic wooden crate.

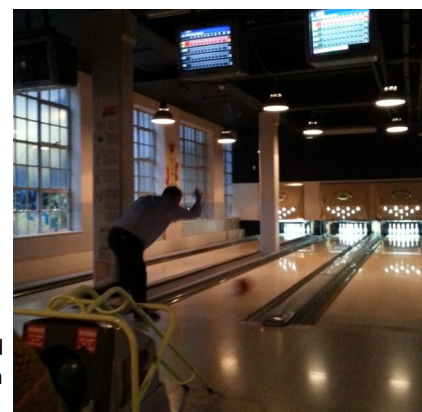
There was a little uncertainty among staff at first as to how satisfying the fruit would be. Or how easy it would be to eat a big orange or kiwi fruit, for example, whilst listening to a talk or presentation! However despite this little resistance at first to bid farewell to their favourite biscuits, most of the staff at the BRU agree that the change is a positive one and are looking forward to a good munch on those strawberries at the next seminar.

## Tuesday Night Bowling

by Catherine Falconer, Research Associate in Type 2 Diabetes

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March, 18.30pm, The Lanes, Bristol:**

After the success of the Christmas party, the BRU team were ready for some more ‘friendly competition’, this time in the form of physical activity, ten pin bowling. Having donned the shoes, stocked up on some pre-match nutrition (in the form of wine and pizza), and been split into 3 lanes, the scene was set. Despite several people protesting that they ‘haven’t bowled in years’, most took to it well and before long the competition was hotting up. Early leader Richard Hocking (yes he of boyband and table football fame) was soon overtaken by resident statistician Chris Penfold. Despite a late surge from me (and my first strike in 13 years), he couldn’t be caught and this time, Chris takes the honours. Congratulations should also go to Sam Leary for bringing up the rear. Bring on the next event.....cocktails!



Andy demonstrating his bowling skills and showing us all how it's done!

## Babies and church bells!

Congratulations to Georgia and her partner on the birth of Edward (Teddy) Christopher Herbert, 7lbs 3oz, born on Wednesday 12th March. We are all looking forward to a visit from them in the BRU!



On Friday 14th March the big day finally arrived and Miss Lucy Hackshaw walked down the aisle to marry Mr John McGeagh.

And the second BRU marriage looms! Vanessa Er has announced her engagement to her partner Andy. The wedding is set to take place in June 2014!