



Imperial College
Academic Health
Science Centre
Improving Patient Care

Research
Careers
Case Study

Consultant Midwife



Dr Shawn Walker

Consultant Midwife & Researcher in Residence

RESEARCH: CARE FOR WOMEN WITH BREECH-PRESENTING BABIES/CLINICAL TRIALS

How did you get into research?

I have always enjoyed reading and learning from research. I wanted to be a part of creating the evidence. I began by applying for a small grant to help me undertake research to develop in my clinical role. I moved on from there to applying for a PhD.

What do you enjoy about research?

I enjoy designing studies that answer questions that are important to service users and front line clinicians. My research around breech care concerns a clinical ‘problem’ that has frustrated both women and their caregivers for a long time – women want the option of giving birth vaginally to breech babies. So how can we facilitate this as safely as possible?

What was the most difficult aspect of doing your PhD?

It took a little while to settle onto the design of my PhD project. The first few months were a process of being very excited and then being very daunted about how much I didn’t know, how far there was to go. But once I got into the flow, I loved it.

What was the most challenging aspect of continuing your research after completing your PhD?

Clinical practice is very important to me, and I wanted to do this alongside research. The problem for NMAHPPS (Nurses, Midwives, Allied health professionals, Healthcare scientists, Pharmacy staff and Psychologists) is that there are not well-established career pathways that combine clinical and academic work. Those of us who do this have very much had to forge our own way. But funders and Trusts are increasingly recognising the value of enabling NMAHPPs to do this, in the same way our medical colleagues do.

What difference has your research training and experience made to your career?

Because the NIHR are funding a portion of clinical time, I was able to develop my clinical specialist practice without fear that my role would be cut due to funding difficulties. This has made a huge difference to my ability to settle into my role with confidence.

What do you think is the greatest misconception about clinical academia?

Lots of people think that they are ‘not academic’ and ‘not good at research.’ But once you find something you love to dissect, many find they love it.

How has research changed your clinical practice?

Doing research inevitably changes your practice for the better. Often, research findings surprise you and challenge your beliefs. But there is no point to doing research if you are not prepared to have those beliefs challenged.

What has made a difference to progressing your research career?

Obtaining my first fellowship accelerated my career pathway and gave me the space to really focus on my research.

Where do you see your clinical academic career going over the next 5 years?

I hope to become a Clinical Professor of Midwifery Research and Practice.

Dr Shawn Walker, Researcher in Residence, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Shawn.Walker@imperial.ac.uk

Produced by the Clinical Academic Training Office
February 2023.