



LAURA BARR

Role: Advanced Orthotic Practitioner and NRS Career Research Fellow

Institution: NHS Glasgow and Clyde

RESEARCH STORY

My interest in research began with my enthusiasm for evidence-based clinical practice. As an orthotist working both in NHS health care and as an educator, I strongly encourage using the evidence base to support and improve the treatment of patients. There is no doubt that there are many areas of Orthotic practice where the evidence underpinning our treatments is limited, and it was from this stance that I started looking at how I could contribute to filling some of these research gaps.

I was fortunate to have some prior exposure to research while working in the diabetes multidisciplinary clinics in Glasgow, where the team were involved in clinical trials. I also conducted some clinical evaluations and a small cohort study as part of my ongoing CPD and MSc studies, but for the first 14 years of my career that was the extent of my involvement in research.

I was keen to become more research-active, but I didn't want to step away from my clinical position. It was during one of our department service evaluations that I met some of the research team at the University of Central Lancashire. We discussed the new part-time PhD programme offered at the university, which would allow me to evaluate previous projects I had worked on, as well as undertaking new research. This would provide me with the research supervision and support that I badly needed, but there was still one issue – where to find the time.

I began applying for Fellowship programmes which were open to NHS staff,

and was delighted to be accepted as a NES AHP Careers Fellow, starting in April 2022, which was 3 months after my enrolment at the University. This provided a “salary buyout” two days per week for a year, to ring-fence my project time. The following year I was successful in gaining a second Fellowship, this time as a NRS Career Research Fellow, allowing me to continue my research until 2026.

Being able to undertake research within my own clinical area, on a subject which I am truly passionate about, has made this journey a very enjoyable one, and an experience which I wouldn't hesitate to recommend to others.

RESEARCH TIPS

- You don't need to start research early in your career. If you have a solid foundation of clinical experience you can use this to your advantage when entering the world of research.
- Don't worry if your research journey isn't “linear”, not all research positions require you to follow a standard set of steps.
- Chose a research area that you are genuinely interested in. The process can be a long one and if you don't have passion for your subject then you're more likely to lose momentum.

