

## Haematology fellowship – increasing access to valuable trials

Following an application from the Clinical Director for Adult Haematology, NHS Lothian Charity released £80,000 from the Haematology Research and Education Fund for a Clinical Fellow to support NHS Lothian's Haematology clinical trials portfolio at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh. The portfolio has doubled in size since 2020 so, to ensure as many patients as possible can access the benefits of clinical trials, the Charity funding enabled a year of full-time support. Dr. Parsons was appointed to provide comprehensive care to patients with a wide range of haematological malignancies such as myeloma, leukaemia, and lymphoma within a clinical trial setting.

### Benefits of clinical trials

**Benefits to patients today** – Patients who join a clinical trial get early access to new treatments not yet available to the public, which can be important for individuals with conditions for which current therapies are not working or who have exhausted standard treatment options. They receive expert medical care from a team of specialists. This care is held to a high standard, with strict protocols to ensure patient safety.

**Benefits to patients in the future** – Patients also help advance medicine by contributing to the development of new treatments and research. The data gathered from a trial, whether the new treatment works or not, helps scientists better understand and combat diseases which then benefits patients in the future.



When it seemed I had no more treatment options, this trial has given me more years to live my life."

Clinical trials patient



Dr. Parsons, Clinical Fellow



Since Dr. Parsons has been in post, four times more haematology patients have now accessed a clinical trial in Lothian.

## Impact – Increased the number of patients accessing clinical trials in NHS Lothian

With Dr. Parsons in post, the Haematology Team's capacity for clinical trials has vastly increased due to her ability to focus solely on the care of clinical trial patients. They can now support 40-50 patients at any time across their portfolio of 14 trials, a significant jump from the 6-10 patients they managed 18 months prior. Patient uptake has also risen because the requirement for patients to travel to Glasgow or Newcastle for a clinical trial has been removed. The previous travel burden created a barrier for many who were not willing or able to make the journey, preventing their access to suitable trials and negatively impacting their clinical outcomes.

## Impact – Improved continuity of care

Before Dr Parsons was in post, patients would see different members of the team. Now Dr. Parsons manages the care of all of the patients on clinical trials, she has got to know all the patients and built a rapport with them, which means when they come in for a review or an emergency, they don't have to start from scratch explaining their situation. This is a much better experience for patients and their families. Being on a trial can be overwhelming for patients, so a known face helps patients feel more confident, emotionally safe and supported.

## Impact – Enhanced patient experience

To ensure patient safety, medical reviews and checks must take place within specific time frames. Before Dr. Parsons was in post, the team were so stretched that patients in clinical trials experienced long wait times. Waiting times for these patients have now reduced from 4–5 hours to max. 90 minutes, which is important when time is precious. 'Patient Chair' time has greatly reduced, meaning patients are checked on more quickly which makes the process as safe as possible. Additionally, Dr. Parsons provides broader support across the team, stepping in for general nursing roles during absences or holidays. This flexibility has dramatically relieved pressure and resulted in a better overall feeling of wellbeing for the team, resulting in a better experience for patients.

### Case study – Clinical trial offers Colin a life saving treatment option

Colin was diagnosed with Myeloma, a blood cancer arising from plasma cells, in 2014 and during this time had undergone 5 different types of treatment. Last October, he was told the cancer had returned but due to the number of previous treatments he had run out of NHS standard treatment options. He was offered the chance to go on a Clinical Trial at the Haematology Department at the Western General Hospital.

At the start of the trial, Colin was in the clinic weekly. At almost every appointment, he was cared for by Dr. Parsons. He explained: "The consistency was great, it took a bit of the worry out of coming to hospital knowing I would be seen by Jojo (Dr. Parsons). It made the process relaxing which I didn't expect." Because of the frequency of his appointments, Colin quickly built a strong rapport with Dr. Parsons. He shared: "She has a great bedside manner and is easy to talk to as she comes down to your level and really listens." Colin felt Dr. Parsons provided answers that Consultants might not have time for, allowing him to be: "more honest about some of his symptoms." Despite the circumstances, he concluded: "I always really enjoyed my appointments with Jojo!"

After being treated on the trial, Colin is in remission and completely cancer free.



Having Dr. Parsons in post has been a complete game changer for the department. Care and outcomes for patients have improved and stress on other staff in the team has reduced."

Dr. Campbell, Consultant Haematologist

Find out how [NHS Lothian Charity](#) can support you or your team.

Report compiled by Rebecca Caulfield, Evaluation Manager, NHS Lothian Charity