**PhD Proposal title:** Comprehension and recall in a healthcare setting: the factors that can affect patients’ understanding of medical interviews.

**PhD Fee waiver for PhD for up to four years:** The School of Applied Social Studies is offering a number of fee waiver scholarships that will commence in September 2017. If successful this would mean that you could obtain your PhD in this subject area without having to pay any fees. Your only costs would be living expenses. Some teaching opportunities may also be available. The current call is restricted to Scottish domiciled students. Details of each proposal are available at: [www.rgu.ac.uk/funded-studentship-opportunities](http://www.rgu.ac.uk/funded-studentship-opportunities)

**Background**

Health professionals are aware of the many factors that should be taken into consideration when communicating information to patients (Fröjd, Lampic, Larsson, Birgegård, & von Essen, 2007), however little research has been done into how patients’ subsequently process, recall and adhere to that information. There are many variables that can affect level and accuracy of recall. For instance the literature suggests that information couched in confusing language may lead to false recollections, or if an individual does not understand a question they often agree with what the questioner is asking and try to resolve the events around this new information (Gudjonson & MacKeith, 1988; Milne & Bull, 1999, Henderson & Taylor, 2006). Building upon this research, the proposed study aims to investigate how communication styles and psychological well-being (emotional state and levels of stress) can affect an individual’s understanding, and subsequent recall, of a health professional/patient interview; and additionally explore these effects according to age groups and severity of information.

There are a number of documented age differences in memory. Information processing speed decreases with age (Myerson, Hale,
Recall becomes more variable (Allen, 1990; Morse, 1993), and older adults can experience difficulty in encoding items for recall (Rabinowitz, 1984). It has been suggested that older individuals may process information more slowly and less accurately (Schacter, Kihlstrom, Kaszniak, & Valdiserri, 1991), or have problems with source monitoring (Chen, 2004). Furthermore, any situations that may potentially induce stress (such as receiving bad or unexpected information) can further compromise an individual’s accuracy of recall (Kebell & Johnston, 2000; Memon & Henderson, 2002).

Completion of this project will help inform health professionals on the best way to convey information, and assess understanding and adherence to health advice, across age groups.

**Project outline**

This project aims to:
1. Investigate the effects of complicated language on level and accuracy of recall and adherence.
2. Investigate the factors that may adversely affect recall accuracy and adherence.
3. Identify if the effects of complicated language vary across age groups.
4. Determine an optimal method of conveying levels of information.

The proposed project would include samples from various age groups:
- Young adults
- Adults
- Older adults

Who will receive varying levels/severity of information from the healthcare professional:
- Routine information
- Moderately serious information
- Extremely serious information

The participants will take part in a mock health professional/patient interview, and then be asked to answer a series of questions about the event. There will be various styles of interview explored, and the participants will also be asked to recall the content of the interview both immediately and after a suitable delay period.

All responses will be gathered through the use of questionnaires and interviews.

Additionally, case studies or observations could be completed to ascertain how information is conveyed, recalled, comprehended and adhered to, in and subsequent to, a typical health professional/patient interaction.

This project is building upon previous research into how stress can affect memory, interviewing styles, language, ageing and health psychology. It is a topical and important subject area; it is expected that any findings will have applications in current medical practice, but also have further reaching implications for psychology (specifically any situation that requires the conveying or gathering of information).
Project resource requirements

The proposed study will involve questionnaires and interviews. All research instruments will be selected/designed following a review of the literature.

Recording/transcription devices will be needed for the interviews, along with appropriate research/interview facilities.

Eligibility criteria: All applicants should have a minimum of a 2:1 honours degree in a relevant social science subject. An interest in psychology is essential, together with an enthusiasm for working with both the public and healthcare professionals. Applicants should be highly motivated with a strong commitment to applied academic research and should therefore have demonstrable research experience (for instance, through completing a research-based dissertation at undergraduate level or similar).

Contact Details: If you have any queries about the project please contact the Lead Supervisor – Dr Sarah Henderson, s.e.henderson@rgu.ac.uk

Application process: Please send your cv and an expression of interest, that explains both why the proposal appeals and why you are suitable to undertake the research, to Dr Sarah Henderson, s.e.henderson@rgu.ac.uk by noon on 12th June 2017. Shortlisted candidates will then be invited for interview towards the end of June.

References


