Professor Paresh Malhotra

Professor of Clinical Neurology and Honorary Consultant Neurologist

RESEARCH: COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT AND DEMENTIA

How did you get into research? I became interested in biology and medical science at school and can even remember saying at my medical school interview that I would like to combine clinical work and research (and at that time, I am not sure how much I meant it about the clinical work!). I did an intercalated degree with a project in Neuropharmacology, and then a PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience after a couple of years of being a doctor.

What do you enjoy about research? I enjoy thinking about my own work and others' research. That is, what results mean and what they don't mean, and what we might do to clarify findings and take them forward. Nowadays, I am particularly focussed on thinking about research that could result in meaningful change for people living with a condition, and how we do this properly.

What was the most difficult aspect of doing your PhD? Writing up - I still find it difficult to get writing, and much easier to get distracted by working on someone else's proposal, reviewing a paper or grant. I have just about learned that it is best to get something down and then much easier to edit it...

What was the most challenging aspect of continuing your research after completing your PhD? I think the most difficult aspect has been getting funding and support for the next stage and needing to develop a thick skin. I have always (like most people, I think) taken rejection and harsh judgements quite personally, and it took me quite a while to realise that the same grant proposal may be very unpopular with one grant board and then successful with another. Sitting on grant review boards has given me a little more perspective.

What has made a difference to progressing your research career? Persistence and enthusiasm! And working alongside people who feel the same way, at whatever stage of career and at whatever institution.

What difference has your research training and experience made to your career? It has been a fundamental part of my career for over 20 years. Through my research I have had the chance to work with some amazing people, some clinical and many not, and I have been lucky enough to carry out research into a subject that is both fascinating and very important.

How has research changed your clinical practice? I think it has informed my understanding of clinical practice and given me additional perspective. Critically, it's enabled me to speak with patients and their families in a slightly different way, particularly when medicine and neuroscience don't have definitive answers to their questions.

Where do you see your clinical academic career going over the next 5 years? I hope that I will continue to carry out projects that have the potential to make a difference for patients. Even if these are unsuccessful, I think it is important to do them properly, and to enjoy things along the way!

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