

### **PhD/ HRB Centre for Health & Diet Research (CHDR) Opportunity**

The UCD School of Public Health and Populations Science is seeking to recruit a number of PhD candidates associated with the HRB Centre for Health & Diet Research (CHDR). The core vision of the CHDR is to promote the nutrition related health and wellbeing of the population by producing and effectively disseminating high-quality evidence to guide policy and practice in public health nutrition, including research on the determinants and modifiers of food choice and other food related behaviours.

Candidates are required to work alongside each of the UCD PIs on each of the following project work packages. As this is part of a HRB funded research programme, research proposals are pre-determined. Detailed research plans will be set out in conjunction with Principal Investigator.

- The Lifeways Project.
- Management of Morbid Obesity project
- Temple Street project: Morbid obesity in childhood *Integrating technology and paediatric weight management. A randomized controlled trial*)
- Consumer Cognitive Response to Food:

#### **The Lifeways Project**

Lifeways is a long term project which allows us to follow people over a period of time. The study is a 'cross-generation' project– some families have three generations taking part – and we have a particular interest in looking at the effect of food and nutrition on health. The study started in 2000 and the first families were recruited in 2001. We have been following the children's health and development ever since. The purpose of the study is to see how Irish children grow and develop. Many things affect the way children grow, including environment and lifestyle as well as healthcare experience and this study will help us to understand all of these factors better. The project informs important childhood determinants of child obesity and health and in particular they have shown strong inter-generational effects on dietary behaviour. This unique study is ongoing and will continue in the second phase of the CHDR work programme.

#### **Management of Morbid Obesity project**

The focus of work in this cluster has been on the design and implementation of a web-based clinical database in all specialist tertiary referral clinics for morbid obesity in Ireland. The database is now fully operational in the largest Obesity Clinic in Dublin and data from over 1200 patients are held on the system. The system has not yet been implemented nationally due to health service related delays in establishing the relevant specialist clinics. However the system has been successfully rolled out to the Obesity Clinic in Galway which was established in November 2010. The establishment of a substantial database of morbidly obese individuals in Ireland already has had some scientific and policy impacts. A preliminary analysis of the cohort clearly shows that early onset obesity is a strong predictor of morbid obesity in later life, strengthening even more the case being made by health professionals that *prevention must be at the core of the national strategy on obesity*. During the term of the project to date, an Obesity Treatment Group has been established in the HSE. This has

led to the development of an agreed treatment “algorithm” for the primary care of obese patients. The obesity database has had a direct impact on this development.

With ever-increasing levels of overweight and obesity in the population, the clinical management of morbid obesity provides a substantial challenge to our health services. The CHDR works closely with the national clinical centres for the management of morbid obesity in adults, in particular the Weight Management Service (WMS) at St. Columcille’s Hospital, Loughlinstown. The WMS has a team of clinicians, psychologists, physiotherapists and dieticians providing a multi-disciplinary approach to weight management. Under the aegis of the CHDR a database of all patients attending the WMS has been established, enabling researchers and clinicians to study and understand the determinants of morbid obesity and the most effective strategies for its management. The prospective PhD student will work closely with the WMS team and associated researchers in UCD on the ongoing study of this important clinical cohort.

**Temple Street project: Psychosocial health of children who are morbidly obese: Analyses of the existing W82go Healthy Lifestyles Programme dataset/ PhD studentship**

Background: The current medical chart filing system in Temple Street CUH requires that medical charts are ordered up to 2 days in advance in order for data to be accessed and there is a pressing need to develop a system where all members of the team can access patient data without delays. Access to data such trends in weight and height can enhance engagement by the family. Similarly, as many of Temple Street’s patients will be transferred into adult obesity services, it will be important to facilitate the export of data into the adult national obesity clinic database.

As detailed above, the adult national obesity clinic database has been developed and in this project the adult database will be redesigned and updated to include the routine clinical and research data from the Temple Street CUH W82go programme. The database coordinator working on the adult obesity clinic service (currently based in St. Columcille’s Hospital, Loughlinstown) will lead on the IT/database development aspects of this project working with a PhD student who will be based at Temple Street CUH.

The development of a well-structured and highly functional database to capture data from the Temple Street CUH W82go Lifestyle Programme will be critical to the ongoing development of the programme, including audit and quality assurance. The database will provide a vital platform for the research (such as the smart phone intervention described above) that is needed to inform national policy and clinical decisions regarding a strategic, national approach to the epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity.

**PhD studentship:** The detailed research programme for the proposed PhD studentship has not yet been finalized. However a provisional title for the project has been agreed and an outline work programme has been defined.

Title: *Psychosocial health of children who are morbidly obese.*

### **Outline work programme:**

1. Describe the psychosocial profile of children who are morbidly obese and explore associations with indices of “pathological eating”. The W82GO project team have collected a considerable amount of data relevant to this issue.
2. Explore the parenting strategies used with children who are obese.
3. Describe the prevalence of bullying, stigma and discrimination reported by children who are obese
4. Assess the impact of the W82GO programme on coping strategies and resilience in children who are obese using a pre-post evaluation design and potentially drawing on data from the smart phone intervention study, described above.

It is anticipated that the successful applicant for this PhD studentship will be offered an opportunity to participate in the HRB funded PhD scholar programme in Health Services and Population Science research (SPHERE programme), subject to agreement with the SPHERE Programme management team. The later PhD training programme provides structured training in research methods, biostatistics and communication skills and other relevant modules.

**Potential MD thesis:** It should be noted that while dedicated funding is proposed for the PhD studentship as detailed above, the work on the paediatric obesity clinic database will support additional projects, including work on a potential MD thesis. The MD thesis project will provide specialist training in obesity research to a Paediatric Specialist Registrar and it will involve a more extensive evaluation of the impact of the W82GO programme on the cardio-metabolic health of children with severe obesity. The clinic database and supporting infrastructure will provide considerable support for this doctoral research project for which salary support is available from other sources.

**Consumer Cognitive Response to Food:** This work study has effectively integrated social, behavioural, economic and biological perspectives on food choice across approximately 15 inter-linked projects which draw on diverse methodological approaches spanning the spectrum from classical quantitative designs to media content analyses. The outputs from the study have produced understanding of food related behaviour across the life course with *direct relevance* to the development of appropriately targeted health promotion strategies. In particular the work has highlighted the need to understand the conscious and unconscious patterns, as well as explicit and implicit attitudes, that shape food choices and other aspects of food related behaviour. It has also highlighted the extent to which particular interventions can bring the unconscious into the conscious and thereby exert a profound influence on attitudes/habits/behaviours. This work is also clarifying issues in relation to the stability and sustainability of behaviour change associated with health promotion interventions. A core message from the work completed to date is that *embedded practices are performed at an unconscious level within given contexts*. The embedding of these

practices typically occurs earlier in the individual's life and it is becoming clear that if we understand the context and history of a diet or other health related habit we are more likely to succeed in changing it.

The postgraduates on this element of the project will acquire competencies in qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research and acquire an understanding of risk perception, human behaviour and risk communication.

## **Application Procedure**

An MPH or relevant Masters is a pre-requisite, relevant postgraduate experience would be desirable.

A HRB recommended stipend of 16,000 per year and current UCD registration fees is available to successful applicants.

**An application stating you background and interest along with CV should be submitted to [Christine.ride@ucd.ie](mailto:Christine.ride@ucd.ie)**

### **UCD School of Public Health, Physiotherapy & Population Science (SPHPPS)**

**What is required in order to apply for the PhD / PERMIT Programme?**


#### **For all Applicants**

1. Completed PhD / Permit Application Form (<http://www.ucd.ie/phpps/postgraduateprogrammes/>)
2. Certified copies of transcripts of previous academic qualifications
3. References from two referees, commenting specifically on the candidate's academic suitability to pursue a PhD

#### **For International Applicants**

4. Whose first language is not English or whose primary degree(s) have been obtained in a country where English is not the official language of instruction, evidence of proficiency in English (IELTS or TOEFL score).
5. Visa status as required (this usually follows GSB approval)

**Please Note!**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For September Starts completed applications must be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> May</li><li>• For January Starts completed applications must be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> October</li><li>• For May Starts, completed applications must be submitted by 28<sup>th</sup> February</li></ul>
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**Documents (1-5) should be sent to:**

<p><i>Ms. Christine Ridge, SPHPPS Postgraduate Administrator, University College Dublin, Woodview House, Belfield, Dublin 4</i></p> <p><a href="mailto:christine.ridge@ucd.ie">christine.ridge@ucd.ie</a></p>	<p><i>Dr. Mary Codd MD, MPH, PhD, FFPHMI Director, SPHPPS PhD Programme University College Dublin Woodview House, Belfield, Dublin 4</i></p> <p><a href="mailto:mary.codd@ucd.ie">mary.codd@ucd.ie</a></p>
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**For all Applicants**

6. Interview by a Panel comprising minimum three members of Faculty. This can be conducted by telephone to facilitate international applicants unable to travel

**Process following Interview**

1. Applicant notified of outcome of interview (conditional offer or rejection)
2. Application submitted to SPHPPS Postgraduate Studies Board for approval  
Principal Supervisor and DSP assigned  
Source of funding e.g. grant, scholarship or other noted
3. Submitted to College of Life Sciences Graduate School Board for approval
4. Applicant notified of outcome. Registration open

**Application Deadline: Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2014**