



## Laidlaw Summer 1 Reflection Report

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As I come to the end of my first Summer of Laidlaw, I reflect on the unforgettable experience I've had these past few months and how much I've learned and personally grown since becoming a Laidlaw Scholar. Coming from a STEM background, I never had the opportunity to conduct my own independent research into a topic I am genuinely interested in, so it was an opportunity I was eager to embrace. I've had the fantastic chance to expand my knowledge outside my core discipline of Computer Science and Statistics by pushing myself to conduct research under the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Trinity. This was exciting yet slightly daunting as I don't study anything related to healthcare. However, my supervisor Dr Mary Hughes made the process such a smooth transition. I have thoroughly enjoyed my research and I can't thank her enough for her enthusiasm, support and guidance.

I have first-hand experience of how the COVID-19 pandemic has hugely changed the Irish healthcare system and I knew I wanted to conduct primary research in this area to understand the implications from a patient perspective and their experiences of hospital appointments during the pandemic. Laidlaw has given me the opportunity to become adaptable and resourceful through applying the skills I have gained in college to an area that is completely outside my discipline. I think this adaptability and flexibility is a core characteristic of being a leader and it has highlighted to me the importance of being able to apply transferrable skills to new and uncertain situations.

Furthermore, I learned to be more realistic in the planning stage of goals. Initially, I naively thought I could focus on ten different chronic illnesses, but I realised this was much too ambitious for a six-week project so I scaled back to three main chronic illnesses; Diabetes, Asthma and Arthritis. The ability to plan big ideas and be ambitious is imperative yet I have learned that tailoring those ideas into a more realistic course of action that will be feasible is essential as a leader. Having plans that are attainable alleviates unnecessary stress of trying to achieve something that is impossible and I believe it is essential for researchers to make realistic goals that are feasible within a certain time frame.

Before I began my own first-hand research, I started by examining what research was already done in the field. I began with a literature review of patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's easy to get overwhelmed when conducting a Stella Search that returns hundreds of journal articles. However, I continuously narrowed down my search with the criteria I needed and I soon became attuned to scanning an article and determining its relevance and reliability. By breaking down the initial insurmountable task, I found a rhythm where I was able to read only the most relevant articles. This ensured I didn't waste valuable time. Each article I read was very interesting and I developed themes across articles which gave me an excellent grounding before launching my survey. I also completed the library EndNote course to store my journal articles and allow me to easily reference. This was such a worthwhile tool and will definitely benefit me in the future. From my research, I found a gap in research on the differences between age cohorts and different chronic illnesses during the pandemic. These were two areas I decided to prioritise in my own research. From conducting the literature review and spending long days looking through numerous journals in the library or school of nursing, I realised I enjoy managing my own time. I like setting myself goals and striving to achieve these goals. However, while I enjoy being my own boss, I realised I prefer to work in a collaborative environment rather than by myself. It was a welcome break to meet with other Laidlaw Scholars to chat about our research and how it was going as it got quite isolating working long days on my own.

Once my literature review was completed, I was eager to launch my survey. The first step was to obtain ethical approval. This was a process I had never completed before and didn't realise how much work goes into it! The application process required a lot of thought into the details of the survey such as how participants' information would be used and how I was going to advertise the survey. Taking this time to plan out all aspects of my survey was something that was wonderful to look back on and definitely something I appreciated putting the time into. I have learned the importance of creating a detailed plan at the beginning of a project.

Initially, I thought about doing surveys in hospitals. However, after talking to consultants and nurses I realised given the timeframe of my project ethics approval wasn't going to be feasible as it could take up to six months for this alone. Instead, I decided to use patient representative groups to advertise on their websites and social media. I rang Diabetes Ireland, the Asthma Society of Ireland and Arthritis Ireland and they all thankfully agreed to help. I created a participant information leaflet and a consent form. This was all completely new to me but a fantastic learning opportunity. I conducted my own research and completed a number of online surveys to see what I thought looked the most appealing to entice people to participate. Once I had the application completed along with the fantastic help of my supervisor, it was a nerve-wrecking few days waiting for the

outcome from the ethics committee as I had one opportunity to get approval if I wanted it in time to conduct my research over the summer. I was delighted to receive the email from the chair with my successful ethics approval.

Next, I used an instrument which I received permission from Dr Ashwin Ramsway to conduct the survey. This involved using the Press Ganley satisfaction scale to measure patient satisfaction with their care during the COVID-19 pandemic. I decided to use Qualtrics to create my survey. This was a platform I had never used before, so I enjoyed the opportunity to develop new skills. I adjusted various settings to ensure people could only start the survey once they had consented. Next, once I had the survey created, I made social media posts so the charities could advertise the survey on their Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and websites. I really enjoyed this process of collaborating with the charities – ringing them up and communicating with them. It was a wonderful experience of networking with external people and enhanced my communication skills as a result of these collaborations. I also developed coordination skills as I communicated simultaneously with the three charities and ensured they were all on the same page.

Finally, on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022, I launched the survey. I was eagerly watching the responses and when I opened Qualtrics to see the first response I was ecstatic someone had actually answered my survey! As I watched the responses build up over the next ten days it was fantastic to see the numbers growing. As it got to 10, 20, 30 and so on, it was amazing. In the end 87 people answered the survey which was wonderful. It was amazing to see the accumulation of all my hard work in getting the survey up and running and I was delighted to get a good response.

Once I collected the data, it was time to start analysing it. I collaborated with a PHD student Muluken Basa who was amazing. Having never used SPSS before it was a bit of a learning curve but he helped me understand how to analyse the data. I really enjoyed seeing all the data come to life and being able to see how important a role statistics plays in providing meaningful conclusions from data. Firstly, I analysed the socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics of the participants. It was interesting to see a large number of respondents were female. However, this could be as a result of using social media to advertise the survey rather than women being overly affected. Next, I analysed the results from the Press Ganley Patient Satisfaction Scale. Respondents had to answer ten questions, each with a scale ranging from significantly worse, worse, same, better, significantly better in relation to their care during the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to before the pandemic. I found the mean satisfaction response rate to be 38.5 out of a maximum of 50. This was above average which shows on average people found their care during the COVID-19 pandemic was better than before. I was really surprised to discover this as I had previously believed care would

have been worse. This really taught me not to make any biased assumptions. However, there are some areas of improvement needed as for example 28% of patients said their healthcare provider didn't spend adequate time with them. I believe further research could be pursued in finding ways to improve this.

Next, I was interested to see based on various socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics how satisfied patients were with their care. I discovered 73% of young people aged between 18 and 25 felt their care was worse or significantly worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was much larger than any other age group which I believe warrants further investigation into how additional supports could be made available for younger people. I also found it interesting to compare the type of appointment patients had and their care. 57% of people who had telephone consultation felt their care was significantly worse or worse. This highlighted people who had telephone consultation in particular felt their care was disproportionately worse than others who had video or in person. Comparing across chronic illness, I was interested to learn 50% of patients with Diabetes felt their care was worse compared to 43.5% of people with Asthma and 16.7% of people with Arthritis. This shows people with Diabetes were most adversely affected during the pandemic and additional supports need to be implemented to ensure their health isn't adversely affected in the future. I also conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data I received from the survey. From this, there was a mixture of both positive and negative themes across responses. A number of people were happy with telephone consultation and would like the option going forward. However, many also noted an increase in wait times, cancellation of appointments, lack of vital signs, increased communication difficulties and a lack of support in their chronic illness management. I found analysing the data to be extremely interesting and it provided tangible results from my work. I thoroughly enjoyed everything I learned about data analysis and it is something I definitely look forward to building on in the future.

I learned so much from completing my research project ranging from time management, data analysis, communication and project management. It has been a fantastic learning experience that was complemented with the leadership training days. I thoroughly enjoyed the Lir Workshop. While I normally don't enjoy public speaking, I found I actually enjoyed presenting to the group and I learned so much from the techniques Cathal taught us. I was also very inspired hearing from Helen Sheridan and how hard she worked to pursue a PHD in a realm where very few women pursued that course of action. I learned from her that treating people with respect and having integrity is essential to being a leader. I also enjoyed the opportunity to learn about networking and to have the chance to put what we learned into practice by networking with other scholars. I've loved hearing about how curious everyone is in completely different areas of research. It's amazing to discuss what we're

all going through and to hear the different issues people have faced which are common to us all. It is amazing the sense of comradery across not only our cohort of scholars but also the past scholars. I enjoyed meeting my peer mentor and hearing the advice and expertise she had to offer. I also enjoyed networking with international scholars at the global induction session. It really highlighted to me how far the global network stretches. Finally, having a chance to reflect on all I've learned so far and what I hope to gain from the rest of my time as a scholar during my Laidlaw coaching session was fantastic. It was a great opportunity to reflect on my areas for unrealised potential that I had never thought about before.

Overall, from my summer 1 of Laidlaw, I have learned a researcher is someone who should set ambitious yet realistic goals for themselves to achieve and research takes constant reflection. Being a leader means having the confidence to be able to lead others and not be afraid to face conflict. I also realised the importance of prioritisation and realising it is not possible to do everything. I look forward to utilising and building on all the skills I have learned this Summer in my future endeavours.