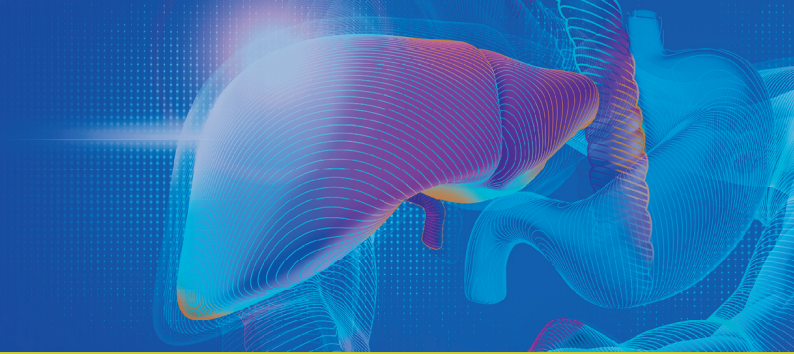


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Dr Falk/Guts UK Awards 2024

NURSE RECOGNITION PRIZE WINNERS : MS ELIZABETH GIBSON / MS LAUREN BYRNE

PROJECT:
**Development of the World's First Virtual Ward to Manage
Complex Nutritional Conditions.**



Ms Elizabeth Gibson and Ms Lauren Byrne are both Nutrition Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) at Russells Hall Hospital, Dudley, West Midlands.

Ms Gibson & Byrne explain:

'We have both worked together in gastroenterology for over 10 years and have a specialist interest in complex GI disorders. One of the causes of renal failure is due to malnutrition and malabsorption in patients with type 1 and 2 intestinal failure, which results in the inability of the gut to absorb sufficient water macronutrients and electrolytes. It is usually the result of conditions such as Crohn's Disease, when a large amount of bowel has been removed and it results in a very high burden on the patient including regular medical intervention and monitoring and sometimes emergency admission. It is an extremely complex condition to manage which requires very specialist care and we had noted a lack of clinical awareness on how best to treat and advise patients, which could result in them spending long periods of time in hospital.'

'In 2019, a nutritional team was created at the hospital which allowed for two specialist nurses to focus purely on supporting patients with GI issues. This provided a great opportunity for us to provide high quality and specialist nursing care to these patients and we embraced this challenge.'

'Originally, we focused on parenteral nutrition (PN) but soon realised that our role would be more effective if we could prevent these patients from progressing to needing PN by providing intensive and quick response interventions. We learned on the job, utilising evidence-based practice to help our patients, focussing on clinical care as well as studying post graduate qualifications to advance our practice from a theoretical perspective. This resulted in a high level of autonomous practice, and we were soon relied upon by surgical and medical teams to support this group of patients independently.'

'Patients were referred to our clinics following progressively worsening renal failure, numerous admissions to hospital, interventions and inadequate clinical care and advice after having intestinal failure for an extended time. Investigating their history, it was clear that, following discharge from surgery, there was rarely quick enough transfer of care to the Gastroenterology team. This meant they had no specialist support for their condition for a period of time. They were 'falling through the cracks' of care. Patients told us of poor and worsening quality of life; living in fear of leaking stomas, disturbed sleep, lack of energy and enjoyment of life.'

'We believed that, if these patients were managed correctly immediately following surgery, not only would they enjoy a better quality of life, but their condition would also be less likely to deteriorate. We also felt that we could provide the same intense support but managing patients from their home rather than in a hospital bed.'

'In 2021 we created the first and only complex nutrition virtual ward in the world, where we look after patients with conditions such as intestinal failure to provide acute specialist care in the patient's own home, rather than on a hospital ward. The ward has six beds, and the use of virtual equipment allows us to monitor renal function, electrolytes and nutritional status and

to intervene where necessary with titration, electrolyte replacement and nutritional supplementation (including intravenously). If necessary, we can refer on to another specialist service. We found that not only were patients much happier to be treated in their own homes, but the interventions were more successful and appropriate for their lifestyles.'

'In its first year of operation, the complex nutrition virtual ward supported 100 patients. Of these, 55 were able to receive early discharge assistance, and 45 were able to avoid being admitted to the acute hospital. 1325 bed days have been supported, with an average stay of 13 days on the virtual ward (110 days a month). We completed twice monthly reviews detailing opportunities for development or learning. This has led to patient led changes, for example a seven-day service rather than five, which lessens the likelihood of emergency admissions to hospital during the weekend.'

'Not only has the virtual ward been welcomed by patients, it has also freed up hospital beds and local trusts have reached out to us for help in starting their own virtual wards since they recognise the potential benefits and ease of replication of our virtual ward (VW) for their patients.'

'We are very grateful for our leaders and organisation for supporting our vision. We are driven to improve the lives of our patients and are keen to continually develop our knowledge and skills in GI.'

Ms Gibson & Byrne's manager Jo Wakeman, Deputy Chief Nurse, Dudley Groups NHS Foundation Trust comments:

'Lauren and Izzy recognised that patients could be cared for more appropriately in their own homes in an innovative way. They then used their tenacious nature and excellent risk assessment skills to make the virtual ward a success. They are talented critical thinkers with a naturally reflective nature, which means they were able to respond and adapt to the challenges of this new practice which required them to step outside of the normal nursing boundaries and become a fully nurse led service. They are compassionate and exceptional nurses who go above and beyond for their patients, creating a trusting relationship which results in better patient outcomes.'

Ms Byrne states:

'I am extremely proud of this piece of work. It is incredible to have the recognition that comes with receiving the award. I am appreciative of the opportunities I've had to expand my knowledge and abilities, and I'm eager to pursue this further. I want to express my gratitude to Izzy for being the greatest coworker and friend for being a consistent source of inspiration and support.'

Ms Elizabeth Gibson states

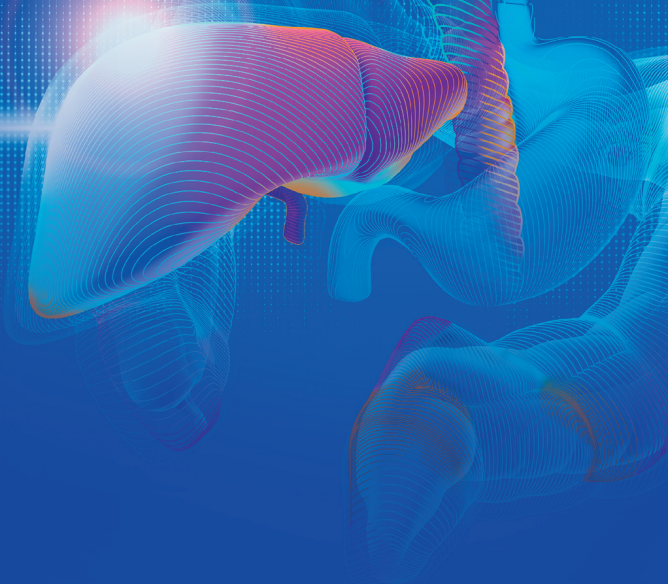
'I am very grateful for this award, and it has given my confidence to 'trust my guts' when making changes in healthcare. It is so important to have a confidante when doing something scary, and that is Lauren! I love being able to make a difference to my patients lives through the support of my colleagues, my leaders, and my organisation. It is wonderful for the VW to be recognised as an innovation in complex nutrition and hope it can be replicated on a bigger scale. I am excited to build on the experience and pursue a career to become a Nurse Consultant in Gastroenterology.'



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