

Investigating the Integration of Glucagon-Like Peptide-1 Agonists into NHS England General Practice for Weight Management – A Sub-study on GLP-1 Users with PCOS

Background

My PhD project explores the integration of glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1s) into existing primary care weight management by incorporating the perspectives and experiences of clinicians and people living with obesity. GLP-1s, such as semaglutide and tirzepatide, are medications that delay gastric emptying and can help facilitate weight loss.(1) However, their integration into primary care raises concerns about added prescribing, behavioural support, and patient monitoring demands on the overstretched workforce.(2) My overall project will aim to identify how clinician and patient perspectives can inform care delivery that meets both groups' needs

With the support of the Phil Strong Memorial Prize, I will be conducting a sub-study on experiences of GLP-1 use amongst people with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a hormonal condition often associated with irregular periods, fertility issues, weight gain, and metabolic complications such as insulin resistance.(3) People with PCOS are at elevated risk for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, and between 38–88% of those with PCOS live with overweight or obesity.(4, 5)

Weight loss is known to help alleviate PCOS symptoms and is promoted as a means of self-management and symptom reduction.(6) Currently, people with PCOS report inadequate support with weight management in general practice and low confidence in clinicians' ability to help.(7-11) For those unsatisfied with existing care and struggling to lose weight, GLP-1s may be viewed as an appealing option, particularly to address co-occurring insulin resistance.(12) The profile of GLP-1s in PCOS care has continued to expand, with increasing discourse on social media and a growing market of private services promoting the medications for this indication.(12-14) People with PCOS mark an especially important sub-set of GLP-1 users to document, as this novel class of medications intersects with a historical lack of research and ongoing frustrations regarding available treatments.(14)

The findings of this sub-study will further contribute to the broadening field of sociological work on GLP-1s and the implications that they hold for cultural perceptions of obesity, (gendered) weight stigma, and individual responsabilisation for weight loss. My study will also explore direct-to-consumer pharmaceuticals, and how this model of care delivery manifests in patients' day-to-day lives.

Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of individuals with PCOS who access GLP-1s through NHS and private avenues within England, and to consider how these experiences can inform future provision in NHS primary care.

Methods

Semi-structured narrative interviews will be conducted with up to 20 adults living in England with a formal diagnosis of PCOS who are currently or have previously used a GLP-1 for weight management. Using a narrative approach, interviews will begin with an open-ended question, allowing participants to recount experiences with weight management leading up to, during, and following (if applicable) GLP-1 use.(15) This approach gathers in-depth personal accounts, followed by targeted follow-up questions.

Participants will be recruited through charities, social media, PCOS-specific platforms, snowballing, and the charity Verity. Interview data will be coded using NVivo, and the One Sheet of Paper method will be used for analysis.(16)

Activities Supported by the Prize and Current Progress

The prize fund has been allocated to fund interview vouchers, training courses, and the co-design of a visual output. A detailed breakdown of the funding is presented below:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Interview vouchers	£25 x 20 = £500
Online course on Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research through the Social Research Association	£165
Online course on Data visualisation and infographic design through the Social Research Association	£165
Social Research Association Membership (works out to reduce the overall cost of the courses above)	£25
Voucher fees for online workshop to co-design a visual output	£50 x 6 = £300
Total cost	£1155

At this point, I have conducted preliminary patient and public involvement (PPI) work to inform the study design and have submitted an ethics application to seek approval to interview. Based on the process of recruiting and speaking to PPI representatives, there appears to be strong interest in and support for research within this area. The PPI representatives who I have spoken to will be involved in the online workshop following completion of interviews and analysis.

I have undergone the online training courses on Positionality and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research and on Data Visualisation and Infographic Design. Both training courses were highly beneficial to my skillset as a qualitative researcher and will inform my approaches to analysis and dissemination moving forwards. The training on positionality and reflexivity was of particular value, as it has given me additional tools to critically examine my role as a researcher

with lived experience of PCOS, as well as helping me navigate the complex positionality involved in researching obesity.

I am very appreciative to have been selected for this prize, as the funds will allow me to undertake a sub-study that I am passionate about and that I believe can help utilise lived experiences to better meet care needs moving forwards. Additionally, the training courses and funding for the co-design workshop have offered valuable opportunities to develop my skills and grow as a researcher.

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