

Summary Report, June 2023: Mr Charlie West 2021 Fergus Scholefield Cancer Research Grant from Penguins Against Cancer



I am an ex-GHRFC Club Captain from the 2010/11 season and am now a Colorectal Surgery Research Fellow at University Hospital Southampton undertaking a PhD in reconstruction following pelvic exenteration surgery. These operations are able to give patients with tumours that would have not been treatable only a few years ago, a good chance of a lifelong

cure from cancer. This is truly pioneering surgery that is pushing the boundaries of what is possible, but it can come at a significant cost to quality of life with these very invasive surgeries potentially involving removal of the rectum, bladder, reproductive organs, and parts of the pelvic bone in a single operation.

My PhD is trying to identify the best methods of surgical reconstruction to get the best possible quality of life for these patients after their procedures. I was one of the Fergus Scholefield Cancer Research Fund winners in 2021, and at this time my project had no resources apart from my enthusiasm. This pump-priming funding enabled me to enrol into the internationally recognised School of Cancer Sciences at the University of Southampton providing me with a huge amount of support to start project, was able to pay for involvement of patients with lived-experiences of complex pelvic surgery to make sure my project captured patient-perspectives, paid for set up of a national electronic database to collect quality of life data from major cancer centres around the UK, and most importantly was able to get my project onto the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) Portfolio. This also resulted in Penguins Against Cancer being registered onto the list of NIHR non-commercial partners alongside other prominent charities, and paving the way for future PAC-funded research to have a national impact (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/nihr-non-commercial-partner-list/11458#p>).

This initial progress would not have been possible without the Fergus Scholefield Cancer Research Fund, which then led to my project gaining interest from national funding organisations leading to £55,728 of funding for my study. I am now in the final year of my PhD and my work is having an international impact - I have been able to present my work in academic meetings around Europe in Amsterdam, Bordeaux, and across the UK. This has garnered interest from the BBC (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-66858189>), and I have spoken about my research on the prominent Bowel Research UK Podcast (<https://www.bowelresearchuk.org/can-i-butt-in-podcast/can-i-butt-in-ep-001-pelvic-exenteration-transcript/>).

My first PhD high-impact publication has now appeared in the British Journal of Surgery - (<https://academic.oup.com/bjs/article/111/3/znae042/7624373>), and I am hopeful there we be more to come. My team and I have have now also applied to roll out my study further nationally, by applying for the competitive NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Scheme, for a further grant of >£200,000.

I realise none of this would have been possible without the early support from Penguins Against Cancer and will be forever grateful for that initial backing to turn just an idea into work that will make a difference to patients across the World having some of the most aggressive surgeries possible.