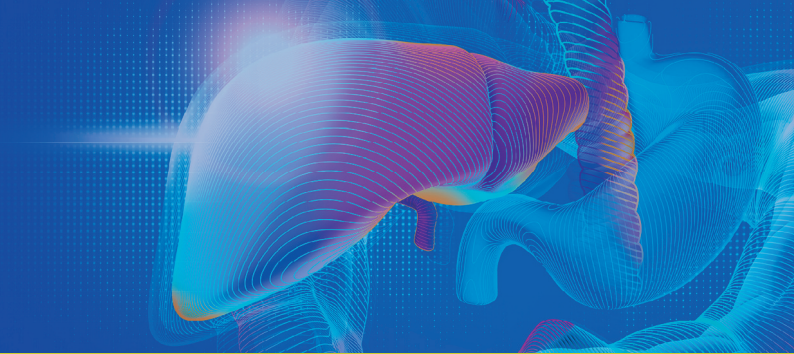


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Dr Falk/Guts UK Awards 2020

DOCTOR F1/F2 RESEARCH AWARD WINNER: **Dr Nicole Cianci**



PROJECT:

Biomarkers for all-cause mortality in Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD): A systematic review and meta analysis

Dr Cianci undertook this research at the Gastrointestinal and Liver Disorder Theme within the NIHR Nottingham Biomedical Research Centre at the Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust and the University of Nottingham. She is currently an IMT₁ Trainee, at Birmingham Heartlands Hospital.

Dr Cianci explains:

'Research was one of the main reasons why I wanted to become a doctor. Doctors treat patients and make a difference to individuals' lives, but through research they also have the opportunity to take our knowledge of science and disease forward, to the benefit many more people.'

'I have chosen this project because I am interested in liver medicine. The liver is such an important and fascinating organ in our bodies. For example, ancient civilizations, from Mesopotamian to Greco-Roman times, thought that the liver was the centre of human life and housed our spirit. Yet, partly because it is so complex, there is still a lack of understanding of many liver diseases, resulting in ineffective treatments and poor outcomes. Conversely, liver disease can have a devastating impact on patients, leading to hugely reduced quality of life and a high mortality rate.'

'NAFLD is an increasingly common disease, affecting up to 1 in 3 adults in the UK. The traditional way of diagnosing and monitoring this disease is by taking a sample from the liver, which is invasive, can be dangerous to the patient, is costly, and is not always available. There has therefore been much emphasis on finding and introducing a wide range non-invasive tests, ranging from the use of latest imaging techniques to analysing blood and serum markers, to not only diagnose, but also predict who is at a higher risk of dying from this disease.'

'In this study, we aim to pull together the available research on non-invasive tests, to determine their success at predicting death rates. I hope that we will be able to demonstrate that certain tests can be used in clinical practice, in particular to predict those at high risk of mortality so that they can receive more focused and aggressive medical care. Ultimately, so that people with NALD can lead longer and happier lives.'

Dr Cianci's Project Supervisor, Consultant Gastroenterologist and Deputy Director and Theme Lead, NIHR Nottingham BRC, Professor Guruprasad P. Aithal comments:

'Dr Cianci is the most accomplished upcoming clinician scientist I have met in the past ten years. She already has a rich career portfolio and has been a co-author of three publications including one in 'Scientific Reports'. Nicole is very motivated, efficient, a self-starter and a good finisher too, a superb communicator and an effective leader. A number of biomarkers are being investigated for monitoring liver disease and a systematic review of this NAFLD area is crucial. I hope that this Award will encourage a young physician with the brightest of futures to consider an academic path.'

Dr Cianci states:

'Winning this award means many things to me. It provides motivation to continue pursuing my career both as a doctor and as an academic, which has its challenges and difficulties. It is a validation of my abilities as a researcher and the importance of my project. Crucially, as research is often very expensive the prize money will allow me to access tools to maximise my project, including courses on performing systematic review and meta-analysis. Finally, winning this award will give me a platform to pursue larger projects and awards in the future.'

'I am extremely grateful to Guts UK and Dr Falk for investing in us young doctors and I hope that I can make the most of this award and indeed produce research that will be of benefit to patients.'



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