



**PROJECT:** Very low energy diets as a treatment for non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, a randomised controlled trial

*'Receiving the Dr Falk Research Award is a privilege and a great encouragement as I embark on an academic clinical career. The support of CORE in primary care research is really welcomed and I would hope that the role of primary care in this area of medicine is supported in the future.'*

*Dr Laura Heath is a Foundation Year 2 Doctor at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford.*

*She has recently completed four month academic block research rotation at the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Services, University of Oxford.*

'A third of adults in Britain have some stage of fatty liver disease, often caused by being overweight. Too much fat in the liver can irritate the liver causing inflammation and scarring. As scar tissue replaces healthy liver, the liver stops working properly and can cause liver cancer. There is no established treatment for fatty liver and patients are usually given generic weight loss advice.

'Theoretically, the more weight lost, the greater the benefit, but advice to lose weight rapidly is usually avoided, because the release of fat from body stores may damage the liver. However, this may be a temporary effect and could subside. Very low energy diets (VLEDs) use meal replacements and to help people severely reduce their usual energy intake.

'We know that people who use VLEDs lose more weight after one year compared with gradual weight loss advice and support. The aim is to test if a doctor referral to a VLED programme might be suitable for people with fatty liver disease and halt or slow down the progression of liver disease compared with usual care.

I was interested in this project due to the significant and increasing prevalence of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease in the U.K. population, on the increasing pressure on general practitioners to diagnose it, but the lack of effective interventions that are available.'

***Dr Heath's Supervisor Professor Paul Aveyard comments:***

'We have all noted that Laura is ambitious, enthusiastic and thoughtful. She has thrown herself into developing a set of basic research in systematic reviewing, analysing cohort data and in qualitative research. She has learned these through on the job struggling with the tasks, formal taught programmes and collaborating with her colleagues. She is open to new ideas and responds very well to advice and guidance in her work. We were struck by the mature way in which she approached her work and her strong sense of mission.'