

## *Navigating Doctoral Studies: Overview*

Doctoral level training enables AHPs to lead research which impacts clinical practice and improves patient experience. While rewarding, the doctoral journey may sometimes become an isolating experience. These handy top ten tips represent an overview of the navigation of doctoral studies. These tips are written by healthcare professionals outside of medicine undertaking doctoral studies and by those with recent experience of successfully completing a doctoral studies within clinical and non-clinical environments.

### *Tip 1 – Stay connected*

Working in research can at times be isolating, so ensure you stay connected with your clinical colleagues and be proud to share your progress with them. Utilise online communities such as the 'Healthcare Professionals in Research' (HPIR) group on Facebook. Make sure to protect time for yourself, your friends and family throughout your doctoral journey.

### *Tip 2 – Project Management and Supervision*

Doctoral studies are substantial research projects that require self-directed initiation, planning and execution within a specified time. The self-directed initiation of research supervision, presentation and publication are important. Engagement with feedback from a variety of sources will advance your insight. Plan to write from the beginning; a doctoral thesis is a substantial piece of written work.

### *Tip 3 – Get involved*

To learn and share through networking is an integral part of the doctoral process. Social media can be great for this, think about joining Twitter and relevant Facebook groups. Be proactive in joining relevant societies and committees. Engage with larger organisations like the CAHPR or your local NIHR Clinical Research Network, keeping an eye on local events.

### *Tip 4 – Consider the process*

Part time or full time doctoral studies are self-directed with supervision provided by the University. The process involves three phases; preparation for research, doing research and thesis writing/preparation for the oral examination or viva voce. To ensure students are on track, Universities support a transfer process from MPhil to PhD or a doctoral process with early/mid/late stage assessments.

### **Tip 5 – Personal development**

Personal development is a voyage of discovery that continues during the doctoral journey. Identify gaps in your skills and knowledge using the Researcher Development Framework ([www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)), then fill those using CAHPR resources, Graduate school courses and other online courses. Don't forget to look after yourself whilst meeting your goals by developing skills in mindfulness, meditation and relaxation to build resilience.

### **Tip 6 – Future planning**

Future planning is essential, come up with a 2-5 year plan then figure out how to get there. Look at postdoctoral job adverts, identify the essential/desirable skills required by employers then use your Doctorate to gain those skills. Grant funding may take up to a year so prepare to apply in the final year of your doctorate.

### **Tip 7 – Funding**

Be prepared - time and effort in planning will be rewarded. Some doctorates do come with a small stipend. Be diverse in the places you seek support. Your professional body, charities, conferences and prizes will offer grants and bursaries. NIHR, CAHPR and CLAHRC all have various funding opportunities. A well-established support structure is vital if funding falls through.

### **Tip 8 – Health & wellbeing**

Make links with other doctoral students. Take regular breaks and take time to rest and recuperate, particularly after times of stress. Exercise allows breathing space when feeling blocked or frustrated. Meditation and mindfulness can be helpful: <https://www.headspace.com/>. All universities should have free mental health provision for staff and students. The Samaritans and Mind offer invaluable support in times of crisis.

### **Tip 9 – Friends and family**

Undertaking a doctorate can be a particularly challenging experience. There are many deadlines to meet and much work to be done. This can take its toll on your relationships with friends and family. Communicate openly and honestly about your doctoral commitments. Make sure to create some non-negotiable time in your diary for friends. This will help to keep you grounded.

### **Tip 10 – Free resources**

CAHPR publishes useful resources and organise training events that may be used to supplement the University doctoral courses. Seminars and training events, including writing workshops, enable you to stay connected with your community, while learning new skills.

For contact details about your local hub and for further information about **cahpr** please visit our website <https://cahpr.csp.org.uk>

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