

SSA Post-doctoral transitional development support

Dr Erikas Simonavičius

I am a Research Associate at the Nicotine Research group based at the Addictions department, King's College London. I was fortunate to receive post-doctoral transitional development support jointly funded by the Society for the Study of Addiction and NIHR Maudsley Biomedical Research Centre (BRC). So far, the support for a part-time research position has allowed me to set up a research project, connect with researchers exploring electronic health data and identify and start drafting research applications for future funding opportunities.

Over the last 8 months, I centred upon setting up a research project that uses Clinical Record Interactive Search (CRIS) system, which provides access to anonymised clinical health records of patients at South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Trust. This system enables me to explore how regular healthcare records can be applied for identifying people on a pathophysiological pathway towards smoking-attributable cancers. While setting up the project, I have discussed my research aims with CRIS researchers and with their support identified which electronic health data at CRIS and its linked databases (e.g. National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service and Hospital Episode Statistics) are most relevant to my research. Two months after submitting a data request application I received the data which I am currently cleaning and preparing for analysis. Applying for health data access showed me difficulties that arise when using these data for research (e.g. scope of health data records, sampling limitations, waiting times to get access to data, etc.) and helped me to anticipate and address them in forthcoming funding applications.

I have also identified a few post-doctoral funding opportunities and joined the proposal writing workshop organised by the Research and Innovation Committee at IoPPN, King's College London. I am applying to one of the identified funding options—Cancer Research UK (CRUK) Prevention and Population project award—and have shared and received feedback on the initial draft from the workshop members. At the same time, I had discussed my project with CRUK and will incorporate their feedback to the full application for the call. For this post-doctoral project, I intend to use Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD)

service and have approached researchers at IoPPN who will support me with the CPRD data management.

The SSA and BRC funded post has allowed me to broaden my understanding of temporal disease trajectories between early treatment events and subsequent preventable diseases. I have reached out to a couple of research groups that explore temporal disease trajectories towards cancer and plan to use their shared data on specific trajectories towards smoking-attributable cancers for identifying research sample in my proposed project.

Next, I intend to prepare and apply for the CRUK project funding, clean and analyse CRIS data and further explore opportunities for incorporating electronic health data into research on health risks of smoking and engaging in other harmful behaviours.