

Frequently Asked Questions

MPhil/PhD in Palliative Care at the Cicely Saunders Institute

Who can do a PhD at the Cicely Saunders Institute?

We welcome professionals from a wide range of backgrounds, which fosters a very dynamic and productive environment. Previous or current PhD students include doctors, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, social scientists, health services researchers, and those from social work, mental health, philosophy and other backgrounds. To find out more about our current PhD students please [click here](#).

Do I need an MSc and research experience in palliative care to obtain a PhD?

We usually expect potential PhD candidates to have an MSc in Palliative Care or related subject (with a 2:1 degree), and to have undertaken at least some research in palliative care or rehabilitation prior to commencing a PhD.

Research in palliative care and rehabilitation medicine is challenging in a number of ways, and for this reason, it is helpful to have undertaken our MSc first, as it provides the skills to progress more quickly. The [MSc in Palliative Care](#) which we run here at King's College London provides an excellent grounding for progression to a PhD; it will equip you with the specific palliative care research skills needed, and also enable you to get to know senior staff members in the Institute. However, we look at each individual's background when considering them for a PhD, and develop a personalised training plan with them to support their PhD progress.

What makes a successful PhD?

We aim for the highest standards of research at the Cicely Saunders Institute. Those who work here or collaborate with us, share a joint aim for the highest quality research, which not only contributes to the field of palliative and end of life care, but also advances methodology in this area.

To achieve a successful PhD, three components are essential:

1. A good, hard-working candidate (you), who can demonstrate commitment, potential, and dedication to achieving a long term goal (the PhD). You will also need to demonstrate that you can commit the time to undertake and complete your PhD.
2. Excellent supervisors, with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to guide you successfully along the PhD path, and with a good balance of knowledge and experience pertinent to the proposed PhD study.

3. A supportive and dynamic PhD environment, where you can gain peer support, receive appropriate transferable skills training and development, and which fosters lively engagement with the relevant research field, good networking, and breadth & depth to your PhD related learning.

Our department can help with the latter two – providing excellent supervisors, and a dynamic learning environment.

What about funding?

The Institute does not have a taught PhD programme or scholarships routinely available.

There are three routes to achieving funding for a PhD:

1. From time to time, Research Training Fellowship posts (designed to enable the post holder to undertake and complete a PhD) are advertised in connection with the Department. These are infrequent opportunities, and when these Fellowships do arise, they are highly sought after and very competitive. Please check [our website](#) regularly for further information about these posts.
2. Alternatively, if you have a research interest, and it aligns with the Departmental research strands, then you can talk with one of the Postgraduate Coordinators, who can put you in touch with a senior Researcher (and potential Supervisor). If they believe that your proposed area of research will be appropriate for PhD study within the Department, your potential supervisor can help you identify other sources of funding, and assist with the application process. It will help if you have thoughts about the funding options available to you. Funders look for this kind of collaboration in applications, and without it, you are less likely to be successful.
3. You can also apply for a Research Assistant post within the Department, and, if successful, discuss with your manager if your work in this post can be used towards a PhD.

I am based, not in the UK, but overseas. Can I undertake a PhD with the Cicely Saunders Institute?

Yes, you can. Ideally, you will be able to identify a scholarship from your own country which can support your studies. However, the department requires that at least 12 months out of 36 months is spent in the Institute; this is to ensure students benefit fully from the training and environment provided here.

What training and support will you offer me during my studies?

There are excellent training and support facilities provided both within the Cicely Saunders Institute, in the Graduate School, and within King's College London.

We have Skills Development workshops, Journal Clubs, Researcher Meetings, and PhD Peer Support Group Meetings, which occur regularly in the Department (on a monthly or fortnightly basis). In addition, formal support (such as Project Advisory Groups) and more informal support is extensively available for any study on-going in the Cicely Saunders Institute.

King's College London has an excellent Graduate School and a very well developed PhD programme for training, support and development. This includes a wide range of training (for example, in the use of IT packages and software, networking, writing skills, presentation skills, and other research dissemination skills).

The Guy's, King's and St. Thomas' School of Medicine library based in the Weston Education Centre has around 10,000 books and 500 current periodicals including a large range of electronically accessible journals which can be accessed remotely. These cover all areas of clinical medicine and dentistry, health service matters, sciences and professions associated with medicine and dentistry. The Library also maintains a collection of learning materials contributing to the educational programmes, clinical work and research of Guy's, King's and St. Thomas' School of Medicine. The collection has strengths in the areas of gastroenterology, liver disease, diabetes, obstetrics, gynaecology, paediatrics and the history of medicine but also covers palliative care, public health, health care policy, and medical audit.

Who shall I contact for more information?

The Postgraduate Coordinators in the Department are:

- Dr Matthew Maddocks
Lecturer and Senior Physiotherapist
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- Dr Richard Harding
Reader in Palliative Medicine; Director of Global Programmes and Partnerships
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- Dr Wei Gao
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Alternately the PhD Administrator can be contacted at phd-csi@kcl.ac.uk