

QUALITY & SERVICE
IMPROVEMENT AWARD

TEAM LEAD APPLICANTS:

Dr Naveenta Kumar, Consultant Hepatologist
Ms Abigail Greenwell, Hepatology Specialist Physiotherapist,
Royal Free London, NHS Trust



TEAM MEMBERS:

Ms Bodene Benade, Hepatology Specialist Physiotherapist
Ms Victoria Nudd, Lead Hepatology Clinical Nurse Specialist
Ms Chavi Schneck, Senior Specialist Dietitian
Ms Fatema Ahmed, Lead Liver Pharmacist
Mr Jeff Fernandez, Lead Alcohol and Drug Liaison Nurse
Ms Lauren Effeney, Occupational Therapist

TITLE OF PROJECT:

**A Novel Multidisciplinary Cirrhosis Rehabilitation Programme
to Improve Frailty and Quality of Life in Patients**

“ The award will help fund exercise equipment for the clinics and post exercise protein snacks. It will also fund transport costs for patients who cannot otherwise attend.

Dr Naveenta Kumar

* British Association for the Study of the Liver

Dr Kumar and Ms Greenwell explained the project:

'Patients with advanced liver disease who are hospitalised often become increasingly frail, malnourished and sarcopenic. This can quickly lead to a negative spiral of further hospitalisation, a decrease in quality of life (QoL), a need for increasing medical and social care, specialist equipment and poorer clinical outcomes.

In our clinic we had been reviewing decompensated patients after discharge, with the aim of finding ways to improve their QoL. We included assessments for muscle wasting and sarcopenia and we were quite shocked to find that over 90% of our patients were categorised as frail. We would advise on diet and exercise but with a ten-minute slot and patients who often struggle to retain information, this approach clearly wasn't sufficient. We needed to find an alternative way to address this situation with the support of the wider MDT.

We initially approached this as a pilot to determine if we could demonstrate some improvement in the patient's sarcopenia and QoL. Additional long-term goals were to assess whether this project could reduce readmission rates. We presented our case to the hospital who agreed to provide a small amount of initial funding towards exercise equipment, or costs such as renting clinic space.

The clinics began in March 2025 and were offered to all patients with decompensated cirrhosis and frailty who were willing to attend. Each week, a 45-minute exercise session is followed by a half-hour talk, given by a different healthcare professional including dietitians, physiotherapist and alcohol support nurses. The clinics are run on an eight-week cycle so that patients can join the programme at any time.

At six months we assessed the first 14 patients to complete the programme and found that Liver Frailty Index scores had improved significantly in them all. Prior to joining the programme, ten patients (71%) were classed as pre-frail and three (21%) as frail. Post rehabilitation, all patients had improved, with no patients in the frail category and 21% of patients now classified as robust. QoL scores were significantly improved, with the most pronounced changes reported in mobility, usual activities and pain/discomfort.

Longer term, by assessing re-admission rates, length of stay when hospitalised and recompensation rates, we hope to investigate whether attending the rehabilitation service may have an impact on reducing hospitalisation rates.

What we didn't expect was the peer support that formed within the group. Patients swap phone numbers and meet up to share experiences of living with liver disease. Not surprisingly, our feedback highlighted that patients who attended had improved understanding of their disease, felt more empowered and enjoyed the peer support.

It's never easy to get people to sign up for exercise classes, especially if they have been ill, but word has spread, consultants are beginning to refer their patients and we've got a steady stream joining up now, which is great.

This has been an incredibly fulfilling project to work on. We know of two patients who attended the clinics who subsequently became fit enough to have a liver transplant, which was life saving for them. It has also been extremely rewarding to see different members of the MDT pooling together their experience and their ideas while liaising with patients to make sure we are delivering patient-centred care. Our challenge now is to continue running this service in a sustainable way and see it embedded into the regular cirrhosis service.'

Dr Kumar comments of the award:

'I am very grateful for this award. It's fantastic for the efforts of the whole multidisciplinary team to be recognised, they have gone above and beyond to set up a novel, inclusive rehabilitation programme for our patients and it's a model we hope can be replicated across the UK.'

Ms Greenwell comments of the award:

'Winning the Falk Foundation/ BASL / Liver UK Award for our cirrhosis rehabilitation programme is a huge honour and something I feel incredibly proud of. This award is a wonderful recognition of the hard work, dedication and passion of everyone involved. I feel extremely grateful to be part of such a committed team, and proud that our work is helping to make a real difference to the lives of people living with cirrhosis.'

