

FORECAST STUDY

Newsletter 2

The FORECAST Study: Factors Predicting the transition from acute to persistent pain in people with sciatica

STUDY NEWSLETTER 02: 10/02/23

Study Update

A huge thank you to everyone who has taken part in the FORECAST study so far – working together we have a truly fantastic opportunity to better understand sciatica and ultimately improve care for people who are suffering.

In our second newsletter, we are delighted to delve into a great question that we have been asked by our participants, and introduce two more of our collaborators. The FORECAST Psychologists!

Since November, we have started collecting MRI scans for some of our participants and healthy volunteers. This represents a fantastic step forward for the study, and we are very grateful to the participants who have taken part in the scanning appointments so far - their patience and feedback while we set the new protocols up has been fantastic. We are also grateful for the hard work of our MRI collaborators and the FMRI radiographers whose patience and skill has been essential in getting this important part of the study up and running. We will hear more about the imaging part of the study in future newsletters. We can't wait to look at the images!

For now, the study team continues to work on recruitment, recruitment, recruitment. Thank you to everyone who has helped us to get the word out.

A query from our participants: Why do you ask so many questions?!

The FORECAST study questionnaires are detailed and broad-ranging. We are often asked by participants, why do we need to ask so many questions?! The FORECAST study is such a precious opportunity to understand as much about the experience of having sciatica as possible. We are keen to capture as many different aspects of this as we can to help us as scientists and as people interested in sciatica, to learn and move understanding forward. To do this, we are interested in lots of different aspects of the condition - we ask questions about the pain and other symptoms that people tell us about, and also about the ways that sciatica affects people in their day to day lives. For this newsletter, we have asked the study psychologists, Whitney and Geert, to share more about their contribution to the study, and some of the questions that we ask - look out for their fascinating explanation below, and don't miss their profiles at the end of the newsletter.

Working on FORECAST day-to-day



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Psychosocial Questions and The FORECAST Study - insights from Whitney and Geert

As psychologists, we're thrilled to be part of the FORECAST study. In general, research shows that pain is complex and is associated with biological, psychological, and social factors. This means that things as wide-ranging as our genetics, how we think and feel, and our relationships with other people can all impact on how pain affects us. We want to look at this more deeply in people with sciatica.

Based on previous research, we advised on some of the questionnaires to include within the FORECAST study. Some of the questionnaires you will be asked to complete assess things like your thoughts about pain, your mood, social support, and lifestyle and physical activity.

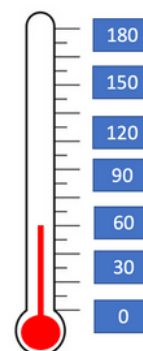
It was also important for us to have a questionnaire that captures experiences that are specifically relevant for people with sciatica. Therefore, we developed a new questionnaire to use within FORECAST. To do this, we started by mapping out common types of thoughts that people can have about health conditions in general. This was based on previous research and theory.

Crucially, we then had a very productive meeting with the FORECAST patient partners, Claire Robinson and Christine Price. During this meeting, they advised on themes and questions to add, and the specific wording of questions to ensure that the new questionnaire reflected the experience of people with sciatica. After some back and forth to ensure that the questions were relevant and clearly written, we finalised the new questionnaire. We feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with Claire and Christine during this process, as it's the best way to do this kind of work.

We are excited to see the data that the new questionnaire produces!

Recruitment update

Recruitment continues until around the end of 2023. Since our official study launch in May 2022 we have recruited just over 60 participants. We will recruit another 120 over the next year bringing the total to 180.



FORECAST Recruitment

Healthy Volunteers Needed!

Now that we have sixty participants recruited, we can start matching healthy volunteers to our participants so recruitment of people who do NOT have sciatica is intensifying now. We need to recruit healthy people of every age so we would be delighted if any of your friends or relatives would like to take part and learn more about the FORECAST study! Please contact us on 01865 234543 or FORECAST@ndcn.ox.ac.uk if you would like to discuss this further.

What next?

As we move into the spring we are continuing recruitment in earnest – working closely with local health centres, musculoskeletal services, print media, and community sites to reach people all over the county who might be interested in taking part in the study.

We are aiming to recruit 180 participants with sciatica, and also healthy volunteers (the same gender and age as our participants).

We are also hoping to start some preliminary analysis looking at some of the fantastic data that participants have shared with us so far. We are very excited to start looking at this and will share our findings in future newsletters.



Geert Crombez

Geert Crombez is a professor of Health Psychology at Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University (Belgium), where he is co-leading the research group of Health Psychology. Foundational to this work is the idea that patients with chronic illnesses are best conceived of as 'normal individuals in abnormal situations', i.e. experiencing daily pain. He investigates how psychosocial factors may have an impact on pain, distress and disability, but also how we can help patients to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle. Geert Crombez and Whitney Scott will provide input on the assessment and the statistical analysis related to the psychosocial factors within FORECAST.



Whitney Scott

Dr Whitney Scott is a Senior Lecturer in Clinical Health Psychology in the Health Psychology Section within the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. She is also a registered Clinical Psychologist and the Research Lead at the INPUT Pain Management Unit at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust in London, UK. Whitney's work looks at the ways in which psychosocial factors relate to the experience and impact of pain, including among people with neuropathic pain. She is also interested in behavioural treatments to support people to reduce the impact of pain on their lives. Along with Professor Geert Crombez, Whitney is providing input on the assessment of psychosocial factors within FORECAST.