

## North2North Staff Mobility Fellowship

### Visit to the University of Akureyri

The University is located in a small town (population around 20,000) in the North of Iceland. The University has a relatively small student population, around 2,300 students. Most of the students are completing their studies through distance and blended learning programs.

I visited the School of Health Sciences. The school provides undergraduate programs in Nursing, Midwifery and Occupational Therapy, as well as a Master's program in Health Science. The School of Health Science has also just been recognised as being able to provide a PhD program, but has yet to enrol any students.

Monday 12<sup>th</sup> November

Travel from Skodsborg to Akureyri.

Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> November

Meeting with Prof Árun Sigurdardottir Professor School of Health Sciences. Árun was my main contact with the University, as we had previously met in Bergen when attending a meeting there with Professor Marit Graue, who we both know. These initial meetings involved understanding the context of the university, the programs being offered and the shared research focus. This included identifying that there is a senior Diabetologist, with whom Árun works, based in Reykjavik, who has been collecting psychosocial assessment data as part of routine care for several years. However, they do not have the expertise in the subject area or the statistical analytical methods required to do anything with this data. We will pursue the potential for collaboration on the analysis and reporting of this data.

Introduction meeting to the School of Health Sciences. This involved meeting most of the academic staff within the school, and learning about their research programs and areas. Much of their programs of work align with my own, focusing on person-centred care, assessment and patient provider interactions. Also discussed and explored the challenges of doing research in small remote universities. I was able to share my experiences from working in remote health care research in Australia.

At lunch time I gave a lecture on the value of small studies, that can be done in remote contexts, and how these can inform and lead to larger impact studies. This was attended by most of the staff from the School of Health Sciences.

Meeting with Professor Eydís Sveinbjarnardóttir, Dean of School of Health Sciences. Eydis is a Psychiatric nurse by background, and has a strong interest in the high rates of suicide in remote and Indigenous communities. Discussions on these issues seemed to highlight many shared issues relating to the high rates of suicide among remote living Indigenous Australians. We discussed work I have done providing intensive Play Therapy (2 sessions a day for 2 weeks) for remote Indigenous Australian children who have experienced trauma. Eydis was interested in this work, and how it might be brought to the Arctic context. Iceland will be chairing the University of the Arctic in 2020, and Eydis will be leading a mental health program. We also discussed the work of digital health and story telling program currently being undertaken by UArctic collaboration. We committed to follow-up on these activities, and look to collaborate on the Suicide prevention program that will be part of Iceland's focus as chair of UArctic

Meeting with Rúnar Gunnarsson, Project Manager of International Relations. We discussed the very positive outcomes and evaluations they have for students visiting the University. Whilst they do run most units of study in Icelandic, and through distance modes, they have sufficient English Language offerings to have over 100 international student per semester. They are keen to send more students overseas, but the main challenge is that many of their students are mature and have family commitments which prevent extended overseas visits. However, courses offerings with blended delivery could be attractive if offered with short intensives. They have had students attend on the North2North student mobility grants, and Erasmus plus exchanges. The other main opportunity for international collaboration will arise now that they have received approval for PhD studies within Health Sciences, enabling them to send and receive international students.

Meeting with Associate Professor Díanna Gunnarsdóttir in Psychology. Dianna is one of 6 staff that make up the Psychology program at the University of Akureyri. We discussed the challenges of delivering a program with such a small staff team, and the fact that they can only undergraduate programs at the moment. We also discussed issues around providing psychological services in remote and small communities. I informed Dianna about the Mental Health academics in the Rural and Remote Health Centres in Australia and the roles they play. We also discussed the challenges of research in small communities for psychology, and the way the group are focused on cognitive methodologies, that do not require large numbers. I told Dianna about some new kit we acquired in my previous role, that provides real time monitoring of frontal lobe activities. Unfortunately, the other staff are all teaching the rest of the week, this is a week when many of the unit intensives are taking place. However, we did discuss how Department of Psychology at the University of Copenhagen could provide support for them, as they being the process of applying for accreditation to have PhD students in Psychology.

#### Outcomes

Prof Sigurdardottir to discuss collaboration on data analysis of psychosocial database currently held at diabetes centre in Reykjavik.

Prof Skinner to connect staff with the centres for rural and remote health in Australia, to facilitate collaboration and shared learning.

Prof Skinner to follow-up with further communication with Prof Sveinbjarnardóttir regarding suicide prevention work in the Artic.

Prof Skinner to follow-up with the Psychology staff on next visit, to support PhD accreditation process and options for providing student supervision where lack of supervision experience is evident in their department.

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November

Prof Skinner provided a lecture for Masters in Health Science students. These students were in attendance for one of their intensive weeks.

Meeting with Prof Sigurdardottir and potential PhD Student. As the school of Health Sciences is now approved to award PhDs, it is seeking to recruit students to commence their studies. Árún has an interested student, who wants to look at the delivery of a lifestyle intervention program for people identified of being at high risk of developing diabetes. We

reviewed Johanna (the students) draft proposal and discussed some further developments and refinements. Given the lack of experienced supervisors in the school, Árún, I was asked if I would be willing to join the Supervision committee, with one Prof Marit Graue and Professor Sigurdardottir. I have of course agreed to this. We are not working on funding applications for the student, who is looking to enrol part-time, unless full time funding is secured.

#### Outcomes

Prof Skinner to join supervision committee of first PhD student in the School of Health Sciences

#### Thursday

Prof Skinner met with Associate Professor Gísli Kristófersson, Head of Nursing. As Gísli is Mental Health nurse, we had a wide ranging discussion about mental health issues in rural and remote populations. Gísli also provides clinical services at the local hospital, including supporting the paediatric department. This resulted in discussions around the challenges of mental health problems in children and adolescents with diabetes, one of my specialist areas of research and clinical practice. As a result Gísli asked if I could provide some case discussions with the clinicians when I return in 2019, to provide local teams with support. I indicated my willingness to do this, and also my willingness to provide this support remotely, through video technology if any issues became urgent.

Meeting with Prof Sigurdardottir and Associate Professor Harpa Arnardóttir. The first part of this meeting was focused on reviewing a Masters thesis Árún and Harpa had recently finished supervising. This was a pilot randomised trial of the use of a lifestyle app for people with type 2 diabetes. I provided additional support for interpretation of the results, in relation to the exploring the mediating role of diabetes distress, and providing suggestions for analytical approach to the large usage data set they now have with 18<sup>th</sup> months of data. This should result in two publications. I have offered to provide support with the analysis if they wish this, which they need to discuss with the student, who owns the data. The data is also very promising, so I have also offered to provide support with identifying appropriate avenues for future funding and support for writing grant applications, to undertake the next larger studies. The second part of the meeting focused on the teaching of one of the units in the Masters of Health Sciences. The unit is focused on living with Chronic Disease, and they wondered if I could provide some content for their unit. This would be in the form of a set of recorded lecturettes, that could sit on their learning management system. We also discussed providing a face:face workshop or Seminar when the students have their block intensive. I agreed to provide both of these. I will suggest an outline of what I can provide, with the resources available, and we will go from there.

#### Outcomes

Prof Skinner to provide notice of return visits, to enable organisation of case studies / clinical supervision for paediatric diabetes services.

Prof Sigurdardottir Associate Professor Harpa Arnardóttir to discuss my role and support for further work with the Master's student.

Prof Skinner to develop short summary of lecturettes and face-to-face seminar he will provide.

Prof Skinner to return for the unit intensive in April 2019, to provide seminar/workshop for Masters Health Science students.

Friday

Prof Skinner provided the Friday morning grand rounds lecture at the Akureyri Hospital. This was attended by all medical clinicians from the hospital, along with many other allied health staff. The lecture was also broadcast to all health service centres in the region. The lecture was well received, stimulated lots of discussion and follow-up questions.

Initial plans were to stay through the day and return at 16:00 hrs to Reykjavik for flight on Saturday back to Copenhagen. However, due to forecast for very bad weather and likely cancelling of afternoon flight, advise taken to return to Reykjavik early. So 11:10 flight taken, and no further meetings.