Predicting Preterm Birth—Success with translational research funding applications.

Prof. Dilly Anumba, Consultant in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, is interested in the physiology of human parturition (child birth), particularly the role of immunity and inflammation in term/preterm labour and pregnancy hypertension. He runs specialist clinics in Prenatal Diagnosis and Fetal Therapy, Prematurity Prevention, and High Risk Pregnancy, all of which have research spin-offs.

Of particular relevance to Dilly’s clinical work is the need for new techniques to predict preterm birth. Dilly has recently (2012) secured awards from NIHR Invention for Innovation (i4i; £320k) and the MRC Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme (£622k). These grants will allow his interdisciplinary group and collaborators to apply spectroscopic techniques to develop and test devices that will predict pre-term birth and therefore ensure that at risk patients receive appropriate care.

Sheffield Healthcare Gateway team members contributed significantly to aspects of these grant applications: Dr Martin Whitaker used his expertise to identify the market, ascertain the novelty of Dilly’s approach by searching patent databases for any competitive prior art as well as determining existing and anticipated intellectual property (IP); Dr Susan Smith helped with the identification of key research milestones to justify the timeframe of the project (42months versus the usual 24months for MRC DPFS) and their scheduling. Both Martin and Susan will continue to be involved in the projects.

Dilly commented that “My team’s multidisciplinary translational research agenda has been immeasurably facilitated by the input of the Sheffield Healthcare Gateway team members, Martin and Susan. Their professional, painstaking, and insightful contribution to developing our recently funded “bench-to-bedside” research project applications was invaluable to our funding successes. Their continuing collaboration will prove crucial to our future aspirations to translate our research ideas into widespread clinical utility”.

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