

## **Opportunity to join the Mental Health Science PhD Thesis Committee for a PhD project entitled “Identifying the brain processes involved in depressive symptoms in people with medical illness”**

### **About the researcher**

Hi, I'm Karel, I have a background in medicine and I initially intended to become a psychiatrist but seeing that the available treatments didn't work for many patients, I decided to direct my efforts into research rather than clinical practice. I completed my medical degree in Prague (where I am from) and a Cognitive Neuroscience degree at UCL, where I then worked for two years as a research assistant.



### **About the project**

During my PhD, I plan to study the brain processes underlying symptoms of depression. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and although effective treatments are available, it is difficult to predict which will work for a particular individual. I believe that that best way to improve our ability to tailor treatments, and to develop new ones, is to understand what drives symptoms at the level of the brain (which is where all the biological, social and environmental causes of depression meet). This is complicated by the fact that causes of depression probably differ between different patients. It may therefore be useful to focus on a group of patients in which the underlying processes might be relatively similar.

In this project, I will focus on people whose depression develops after a medical illness—this often happens with stroke, brain tumours, and some infectious, inflammatory, and endocrine disorders. Therefore, to advise on the development of this project through participating in my Thesis Committee, I am looking for people with lived or living experience of depression following medical illness.

If a certain condition contributes to the development of specific symptoms, it should be easier to identify the brain process underlying them. To do this, I plan to use mainly brain imaging as well as psychological testing, using existing data from a large cohort study ([UK Biobank](#)) as well as collecting new data. If particular brain processes can be identified in this way, I would then test whether they are also involved in some cases where depression develops in the absence of medical illness. The hope is that the brain processes identified might turn out to be useful targets for treatment, for example with non-invasive brain stimulation. Therefore, in the long term this work could help tailor the available effective treatments and stimulate development of novel treatments for depression.

### **Thesis Committee – Roles and Responsibilities**

PhD students enrolled at UCL are required to have a Thesis Committee who provide oversight of the student's research. For Students in the UCL-Wellcome PhD in Mental Health Science, the Thesis Committee includes academics with expertise in different mental health themes, a mental health practitioner and individuals with lived experience of mental illness.

The role of the Thesis Committee is to support the student and their supervisor during the 3-year PhD project. You will be asked to attend a minimum of six meetings organised by the student. At these meetings, the student will deliver an oral presentation, and in some cases will produce a report to be read in advance. Please see the table below for information on timetable and format of the meetings.

The committee members have the following responsibilities:

- Meet with the student at the designated times (six to ten times) throughout the progress of the PhD. Note that additional meetings may be arranged on an ad hoc basis.
- Read Student reports prior to the Thesis Committee meeting (including an Upgrade report which is a formal report to show that the research to date matches the standards of a PhD).

- Approve the meeting reports that will be entered into the student's online Research Log.
- If required, provide additional support for the student, e.g. additional Thesis Committee meetings outside of those scheduled to monitor progress.

Meeting	Time post start of Phd Project	Format
1. Research Proposal	3 months	Research Proposal (~1,000 words) and oral presentation
2. 9 months Report	9 months	9 months report (~1,000 words) and oral presentation
3. MPhil-PhD Upgrade Report	9-18 months	Upgrade report (~10,000 words) and viva
4. Progress meeting	18 months	Oral presentation only
5. Progress meeting	24 months	Oral presentation only
6. Thesis outline and writing plan	30 months	Written thesis outline and writing plan and oral presentation

If you have any questions or if there is anything that we can do to make this opportunity easier for you to apply for please let me know at [karel.kieslich@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:karel.kieslich@ucl.ac.uk).

Payment of £25/hour is available for Lived Experienced Thesis Committee members should you wish to claim it. This will typically include 1hr preparation time for the meetings.

If you are interested in joining my Thesis Committee please send e-mail your CV and a paragraph explaining why you are interested to [karel.kieslich@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:karel.kieslich@ucl.ac.uk), by **31<sup>st</sup> January 2022** at the latest.

Thank you,  
Karel Kieslich