



**EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS**  
IRELAND



**Cochrane**  
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# Evidence Synthesis Ireland Fellowship Scheme

Ciara O'Meara is an Evidence Synthesis Ireland Fellow, and a Lecturer in General Nursing at the School of Nursing & Midwifery at the University of Galway. She is working on a Cochrane Systematic Review, Occupational therapy in multiple sclerosis, with her mentor, Dr Sinead Hynes.



## Why were you interested in an ESI Fellowship?

I was a new member of staff to the University, and new to research. When I saw the Fellowship from Evidence Synthesis Ireland, it resonated as a great opportunity to get on the research ladder, to gather the skills and the knowledge I needed. The ESI Fellowship is very well scaffolded and supported - there's support, help and advice, you're not on your own, you're really part of a team. You have a mentor, the team understand that this is a learning opportunity for you. The whole premise of the ESI Fellowship is to give you the confidence, skills and the ability to start at that lower rung of the ladder, and work your way upwards towards being a more advanced reviewer.

## Tell me about your mentor and team?

My mentor is Dr. Sinead Hynes at the University of Galway, and she has been just fantastic. It's been great to have her level of expertise and knowledge. I'm also making international collaborations. I'm working with Professor Daphne Kos, who's the former president of rehabilitation in multiple sclerosis, as well as a number of other academics who are involved in occupational therapy and multiple sclerosis care from Belgium and the Netherlands. There's been so many opportunities that have come from that. I became aware of the ECTRIMS summer school in Gdansk, where they were looking at rehabilitation of MS. I applied for it and got a place to go. When I was over there, I got to meet Professor Kos in person. Through her, I got to network with other members of the rehabilitation in MS Care Group. Without the Fellowship, I wouldn't have got that opportunity.

## The ESI Fellowship comes with a €1000 Travel Bursary. How did you use yours?

I used my bursary to attend the main ECTRIMS conference around MS Care in Amsterdam, which is my area of interest. It's quite an expensive conference, but the bursary gave me the opportunity to go. I got to network with people from the UK, nurses, OT's, and other disciplines that are involved in that area of research. Dr. Gavin Giovanni is one of the top neurologists in MS Care in the UK, I got to meet him at ECTRIMS and met him again in Poland. So that was a huge networking opportunity. It's amazing the opportunities that have arisen for me, all because of taking that step to apply for the ESI Fellowship. It's opened so many doors in the space of a couple of months, which has been amazing.

## What other opportunities have you been a part of?

I am also collaborating on a SWAR with Dr. Elaine Toomey, which was also funded through Evidence Synthesis Ireland. On that, I'm getting to collaborate with Daniella Pollack, Andrea Tricco, and Heather Colquhoun, who are the world leaders in scoping reviews.

## Have you attended the ESI Training Workshops?

As an ESI Fellow, I get free attendance at online and in-person workshops. So it really makes it accessible, because you can go to as many as you want and cost is no longer a barrier. I've done the online training on systematic reviews - three days



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of experts in systematic reviews, breaking it down into the different steps, how you start from your protocol development up until publication. I've attended a lot of the online webinars with Andrea Tricco, Danielle Pollack, where they looked at best practice of scoping reviews.

The ESI training has not only supported my Fellowship development, but also has increased my knowledge around scoping reviews, meta analyses and different things like that. Because they're offered by ESI, they're readily available, they're accessible, there's online recordings of the webinars - it's a great suite of resources to have. For me, when teaching the masters students within the University, I direct them to those recorded webinars on YouTube, because they've been such a help to me, they're great for the students as well.

## What challenges have you had in the Fellowship?

A challenge, but one that was outside all of our control, was waiting for the initial protocol approval - it was quite a slow process. It took nearly a year with edits required and review points from the Cochrane Editorial team. But on the flip side of that, it gave me time to do the Cochrane Interactive Learning Modules to expand my knowledge and to be able to read up on the protocol, and around papers on the topic. So when the protocol was approved, I was ready to kick into action in terms of the database searches and knowing the next steps involved.

## What would you tell people that are curious about applying for a Fellowship?

My advice is go for it. Yes, it's extra work, but the benefits outweigh whatever extra work is involved. It's not a significant amount in terms of the hours and the commitments required. It's really been just such a fantastic opportunity for me and I would highly encourage everybody, not even just those in the early stages of their career. It's open to everybody that might want to learn a new evidence synthesis methodology for their research, maybe something they're not familiar with. To have that supported scaffolding has been fantastic, because you're not on your own, there's always somebody there to bounce questions off.

## BENEFITS FOR FELLOWS

- The opportunity to learn new research skills - **evidence synthesis methodology**
- **Mentorship** in evidence synthesis from high quality review
- Evidence synthesis **experience** without the need to manage or lead a review team
- **Free attendance** at ESI evidence synthesis training workshops
- **Co-authorship** on high-quality reviews/publications
- Access to **€1000 travel bursary**
- Free access to **Covidence** software during the Fellowship
- **Networking** and collaboration opportunities with national and international **experts**

To learn more about the Evidence Synthesis Ireland scheme, visit [www.evidencesynthesisireland.ie/Fellowships](http://www.evidencesynthesisireland.ie/Fellowships)

