Falk Foundation/Guts UK Awards 2025

MEDICAL STUDENT ESSAY PRIZE WINNER:
Lucy Stiles

Short-Term Outcomes Of 5ASA Vs Steroids in the Treatment of Children with Newly Diagnosed Ulcerative Colitis

Ms Stiles undertook this project whilst intercalating for an MSc in Gastroenterology, at the Blizard Institute, Queen Mary University of London. Ms Stiles will return to her medical degree final year studies in August, at King's College London School of Medicine.

Ms Stiles explains:

'My research project investigated the short-term outcomes of 5-aminosalicylic acid (5-ASA) versus steroids in children newly diagnosed with ulcerative colitis (UC). The way UC manifests in children, often distinct from adult-onset disease, has always captured my interest, so I was excited to undertake an original research project to explore this area further. Paediatric-specific data on UC remains scarce, with much of current practice based on extrapolation from adult studies. Therefore, I hoped that this project could contribute to the evidence base in this unique population.

'Using real-world data from the international PIBD-SETQuality cohort, this prospective multi-centre study analysed 228 children treated with either 5-ASA or steroids for induction therapy. The primary outcome was clinical remission at three months, supported by biochemical markers of disease activity. The main finding was that there was no significant difference in remission rates between the 5-ASA and steroid groups in those with endoscopically mild disease (UCEIS 0–4). Despite this, 43% of this subgroup were prescribed steroids, highlighting a disconnect between guidelines and real-world practice. This is especially important given the potential harms of steroid use in children, such as impaired growth. The study also identified considerable international variation in prescribing practices. UK centres were significantly more likely to prescribe steroids than centres in the Netherlands, even though disease extent and severity were largely similar. This suggests that treatment decisions may be influenced by regional prescribing cultures rather than evidence-based protocols. Overall, the project highlighted the need for further research in this population to develop robust, evidence-based guidelines for paediatric UC, ensuring more consistent and equitable treatment.

'Gastroenterology has always appealed to me owing to its unique combination of practical, hands-on procedures such as endoscopy, alongside patient-facing duties which often involves management of chronic conditions, allowing for meaningful patient relationships built on trust. This research project reinforced my passion for gastroenterology and strengthened my aspiration to integrate clinical care with academic research. It equipped me with valuable skills in research methodology, data analysis and critical appraisal, and deepened my appreciation for the importance of evidence-based practice. I remain actively involved in the PIBD-SETQ initiative and hope to pursue a clinical academic career that combines hands-on patient care with research to improve outcomes for individuals living with gastrointestinal diseases.'

Ms Stiles's Project Supervisor, Professor Nicholas Croft, Professor of Clinical Paediatric Gastroenterology, at the Blizard Institute, Queen Mary University of London comments:

'Lucy Stiles chose to undertake an intercalated MSc in Gastroenterology with us in the Blizard Institute, Faculty of Medicine, Queen Mary University of London in order to increase her knowledge in this speciality. She proved to be an excellent student who has more than risen to the challenge of working on this significant research project. Lucy is hard working and pro-active and was able to undertake most of the work independently, but she also collaborated very well with our international research partners at Erasmus Medical Centre, Rotterdam.

'Her work will contribute to the further understanding of paediatric bowel disease and we are expecting the data to contribute to a significant publication in the next year or so. Lucy has the potential to make an excellent academic clinician - it was no great surprise to me that she won this prize.'

Ms Stiles states:

'Winning this award is a huge honour. It has reinforced my enthusiasm for integrating clinical practice with research and given me greater confidence in my academic potential. I look forward to shaping a career that allows me to stay actively involved in research; I plan to apply for the Specialised Foundation Programme later this year, with the longer-term goal of pursuing an NIHR Academic Clinical Fellowship, and potentially a PhD, in the future. I hope this award will help open doors to new opportunities as I take the next steps in my career.'

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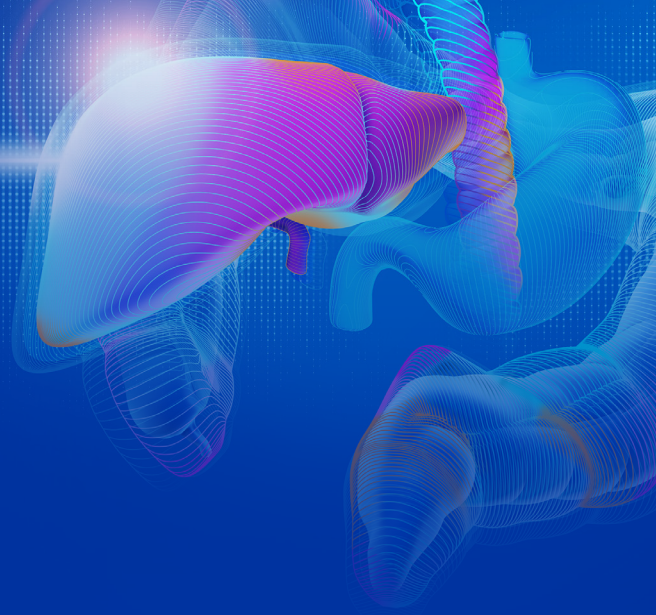

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