

Tamara Williamson



Biography

Tamara is a first year MSc. student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Calgary. Originally from Nanaimo, B.C., she previously earned a B.Sc. in Biology at the University of British Columbia. After several years in the workforce, she decided to return to University to pursue a career in Clinical Psychology, receiving her B.A. after-degree in Psychology at the University of Calgary in 2017.

Broadly, Tamara's research interests pertain to the psychosocial and behavioural determinants of physical health outcomes, particularly among patients with chronic disease (e.g., cardiovascular disease, cardiac arrhythmias, obesity). She is especially interested in the development of effective motivational interventions that promote health behaviour change (e.g., exercise, healthy diet, medication adherence). Tamara completed her undergraduate psychology thesis under the supervision of Dr. Tavis Campbell in the Behavioural Medicine Lab, investigating the "Intention-Behaviour Gap" for cardiac rehabilitation participation, and the role of patients' perceived barriers to attending cardiac rehab. During her time with the SPOR program, Tamara will be exploring the healthcare utilization patterns of patients with low-risk syncope (fainting). After completing her graduate training, Tamara plans to become an independent investigator and Clinical Health Psychologist. When she is not in the lab or busy with coursework, Tamara enjoys weight training and yoga, trying out new restaurants, and skiing.

Project Summary

A Qualitative Exploration of the Needs, Preferences, and Healthcare Utilization Patterns of Patients with Low-risk Syncope

At least half the population will experience syncope (fainting), and 13.5% faint repeatedly. Recurrent fainting is distressing to patients and their families, and many experience increased psychological distress and functional impairment. Over half of emergency department (ED) syncope presentations

are benign, yet 160,000 patients present to Canadian EDs for fainting annually. ED visits are expensive (>250 million CAD/year) and rarely (<1%) beneficial to patients.

In order to provide meaningful, cost-effective support to patients who faint, there is a need to understand: (a) why patients with low-risk syncope access emergency medicine, and (b) which alternative resources they need to manage their symptoms outside the ED. This qualitative study will explore the needs, perspectives, and desires of patients who faint, particularly with respect to their decisions to access (or not) ED treatment.

Patients with low-risk syncope in Calgary, Alberta will be recruited to participate in focus-groups. An interdisciplinary team of researchers and clinicians will engage patients in open-ended group interviews to determine: (a) why they choose (or not) to present at EDs when they faint, and (b) what alternative resources they require to manage their condition outside of the ED. Patients' responses will be recorded, transcribed, and common themes will be identified and described. The information obtained from these patients will inform future studies to develop and test patient-oriented resources for people with low-risk syncope to manage fainting outside the ED and improve quality of life for patients.