



## Student Case Study – Khalid Al-Ani, Anne Rowling Regenerative Neurology Clinic

“The experience I gained from my placement as well as the networking and personal connections I made were invaluable.”

**Khalid Al-Ani - BSc (Hons) Physical Activity & Health**

### Please tell us a bit about yourself.

I am a mature student from Edinburgh. I was originally studying Digital Media & Marketing but swapped over to Physical Activity & Health. I am now in my final trimester in my fourth year with only my dissertation left to complete.

### Can you tell us about the placement opportunity you were involved in?

The Anne Rowling Regenerative Neurology Clinic is a charitable University of Edinburgh clinical research facility. The clinic can carry out research due to donations and grants provided by public, private, and governmental donors. They are also funded via grants from the University of Edinburgh and other global educational and medical institutes, with one current research study named 'MS Microbiome Study' being led and funded by the International MS Microbiome Study, centred at the University of California San Francisco. As of 2023, the clinic has had cooperative studies with over thirty countries in six continents. In addition to clinical care and research for MS, the clinic also runs a fortnightly multidisciplinary Motor Neuron Disease (MND) specialist clinic that also combines research, such as the live trial named MND- SMART, which is testing new potential treatments to slow or potentially reverse the development of MND.

### Can you tell us more about what your role entailed?

My main role and responsibility was to attend, assist, and manage participant research appointments by explaining the purpose and procedures of the studies in layman's terminology. This is important when conversing or explaining complex medical jargon to patients or study participants as this can introduce confusion. In addition, ethical issues could become problematic if the accuracy and accessibility of information provided to participants are not upheld. In addition to assisting with participant research protocols and data collection, I was regularly involved in shadowing the consultant neurologists in their offices during patient appointments.

### What were your highlights and key successes of your time on placement?

A highlight was attending a meeting with a few members of the clinic including the director of the clinic, Ph.D. students, and a Professor of Neurodegenerative Disorders and Clinical Trials. The meeting also included the chief operating officer of the McLaren Technology Group and an honorary visiting fellow of The University of Edinburgh. The meeting was about how to enhance the data-gathering capabilities of the MND - SMART app and how to gather more data from certain population groups. It was extremely beneficial to see lots of different organisations collaborating on mutual ventures. This meeting was an opportunity to get funding from the Gates Foundation to start research around neurodegenerative diseases.

### What key skills did your placement teach you?

Something that I found especially difficult was the emotional demands of this type of work. I struggled to control my anxiety about the diseases I was confronted with. This sometimes made it difficult to fully engage with some patients and found my mind would be elsewhere with anxiety.

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“The placement helped me understand what type of role I am suited for.”

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### What key skills did your placement teach you?

I successfully utilised mindfulness meditation and compassion meditation as part of my daily routine for my general wellbeing and throughout my placement to garner compassionate skills towards patients and coworkers and to reduce burnout and compassion fatigue. I did find this useful as I had no previous experience dealing with patients in a clinical setting, and more specifically, no experience dealing with people with neurological conditions.

### How do you feel that your studies at Edinburgh Napier University prepare you for this placement?

If I am to be totally transparent, I do not believe there was anything prior to the placement starting that prepared me for this type of work. The environment, speed, work-rate and synergy of the clinic was nothing that I had witnessed previously and do not believe that university studies could have prepared me for this.



### Do you think your experience(s) from the placement affected your future career plans or last year of university?

I was unsure how I would fare in a clinical/research setting but was somewhat intrigued by the idea of working in the research field. However, after seeing what it truly entails, I feel more confident that it would not be the correct path for me at this current moment.

### Would you recommend doing a placement to others?

Absolutely, despite not gaining any sudden realisations that this is the type of work I should be involved in, knowing that it is not suitable is as valuable and clarifying as the reverse. Also, the personal and professional skills I witnessed and developed have already got me thinking of how I will adopt and practice these skills in the next role I undertake.

### What advice would you give to someone considering doing a placement at university?

To be proactive. Do not wait around for someone at the placement to ask you to do something. Bring the opportunities to you instead of waiting for them. Ask to shadow as many people as possible and to get their opinions on what they do and how it is best done. Ask them what mistakes they made in their professional processes. Also, do not be afraid to put yourself forward for things, believe in your skills and past experiences as they have gotten you this far. Using this approach allowed me to be involved in a private meeting with representatives from NASA and the head of statistics for McLaren F1.

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