



## **Yolandie Kriel - Transitioning from project coordinator to researcher: why I made the move**

### **Background & Training**

After I qualified as a professional nurse I worked for a couple of years in the public healthcare sector. My interest and passion for healthcare has always been in the public healthcare sector and how the public healthcare system provides services for people.

After working in the public sector for a couple of years I then decided to further my education and I returned to University to complete my honours in Anthropology at UKZN. My decision to continue my studies in Anthropology was based on my interest for Medical Anthropology. During this course I had to do my first research project. Although it was small in scale I really enjoyed the process.

At the end of my honours year I began looking for some work. I knew I wanted to continue with my post-graduate education but I had to work at the same time. I was very fortunate to meet Dr Magula who is currently the Head of Department of Medicine at UKZN.

Under her I started working as a nursing research coordinator. My first project was a large double blinded randomized control trial that was conducted across Africa. The PI for this trial was Prof Bongani Mayosi from UCT. Dr Magula was the Durban PI and I worked with her.

This was my first introduction into clinical research coordinating and even though it was very challenging at times I enjoyed it immensely. I learnt a whole lot about coordinating research during this project, which had a five year duration.

During this time Dr Magula started another study that was a cohort and she asked me coordinate this study as well. This study was different from the RCT but offered me another opportunity to learn more about research in the healthcare setting.

## **Why the move to do my own research**

While I was doing my coordination work I continued with my post graduate studies and enrolled for my Masters in Health Sciences at UKZN. My coordination work afforded me a great opportunity to conduct my own research.

Pursing post graduate education automatically means that you will have to engage in your own research projects. During my Master's degree I had to complete my own research project, which I enjoyed very much. I knew from there that I wanted to pursue a career as a researcher, with a special focus on qualitative health research.

After I completed my Master's degree and the work with Dr Magula I was to employed to conduct a study on adherence to HIV prevention methods. This was my own research project for an external funder. In this project I had a dual of coordinator and researcher.

Currently I am about to start my PhD research project. I have found that my experience as a coordinator has really helped in developing my PhD project.

## **What were the challenges of transitioning**

Currently I am about to start another project where I will once again be in the dual role of coordinator and researcher. I feel that being able to perform both roles is quite an advantage as the coordinator is often quite intimately involved with the research process and the research participants, but at the same time has a good overview of the project.

I did not experience any real challenges between transitioning from coordinator to researcher. I attribute this mainly to pursuing my own post graduate research at the same time.

## **What are the highlights of your role as a nurse researcher**

I think my happiest highlight was the completion of my Master's degree that was awarded summa cum laude. That was largely due to my research project. Another highlight was the award that I received at this year's SAAIDS 2015 conference that was held in Durban. I won the award for best social science poster for the research that I did for my Master's project.

## **Are you still study coordinating**

As I mentioned above I am still coordinating my projects while being the researcher at the same time.

## **Ideas you think are worth sharing with others research nurses.**

My advice to other nurses who are interested in a career as a researcher is to further their own post graduate education. If nurses want to conduct their own research post graduate education is key. If we look at the doctors who conduct clinical trials you will notice that they are either involved with their own PhDs or they already have some post graduate education.

I really believe that this is key for nurses who are interested in pursuing their own research. Research can be conducted by anyone, but you need to have the education and training to guide you. These skills can only be learnt through post graduate education.