

Developing today's trainees to become tomorrow's clinical researchers – an innovative collaboration driving improvements in clinical training and research delivery

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Aims

To develop a unique partnership that enables specialty trainees to become regional champions in research, contributing to the 'delivery of best research for best health' while gaining essential clinical research skills for their future.

Methods

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) UK vision is to deliver the 'best research for best health' whereby the NHS attracts, supports and develops the best research professionals to conduct people-based research. There is evidence that shows involvement in research leads to improved patient outcomes. Most trainees, apart from those following a limited number academic training posts, however, have not taken part in undergraduate research, or structured research experience during specialty training.

Recognising an opportunity to support would be future principal or chief investigators, while promoting NIHR key objectives, a pilot 'NIHR trainee' programme was launched in clinical haematology. A trainee was recruited to become a research champion with the intention of providing structured opportunities to assimilate research experience and knowledge within a 6-month period. For the north west coast Clinical Research Network (CRN), a programme was developed progressively, supervised by a NHS consultant research lead and the local CRN team. Objectives of the role were collectively set at an early meeting led by the trainee and included gaining organised exposure to the delivery of the clinical research, engaging with research personnel to understand key local and national relationships, personally supporting recruitment into trials and understanding the challenges and barriers to performing clinical research.

Results

The first north west coast pilot 'NIHR trainee' was recruited for a 6-month period in the final year of specialty training (February–

August 2017). Trainee feedback highlighted the acquisition of invaluable clinical research knowledge and skills that would make the transition from trainee to a competent consultant much less daunting. The trainee's experiences included attending national specialty meetings supported by the NIHR, visits to the CRN, engagement with industry sponsors, managers and chairing local research meetings. Having created a resource of material and communicated the benefits of her role to peers, the trainee personally recruited the next NIHR trainee to continue the role. The first trainee has since become a new consultant and opened a portfolio study at her trust within the first 6 weeks of appointment. There are now 15 NIHR haematology trainees nationally who have been recruited to the same role, known as HaemSTARs. They have established a communication network across all of their regions, facilitating shared information regarding trial opportunities, open and upcoming studies and support for each other in this unique new initiative. This has led to a measurable increase in patient recruitment and open studies for clinical haematology nationally.

Conclusion

This collaborative innovation addresses an unmet need providing trainees with the first formal opportunity to be part of local and wider clinical research groups as a part of their clinical training. As champions for research in their area, trainees feel valued and supported in developing critical skills and intelligence while contributing to patient recruitment across regions covered during their training. The impact of this pilot programme has been followed up with a national network of trainee research champions with significant benefits for trainees, research teams, NIHR and ultimately patients. Locally responsive within a national framework, this innovation mentored together with peer-supported networking will allow growth of a cadre of future leaders in research delivery within the UK. ■

Conflict of interest statement

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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