

# Experience of an Inter-regional Research Symposium for Higher Psychiatric Trainees in Scotland

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** We present our experience of an annual research symposium for psychiatric trainees in Scotland. This paper aimed to consider trainees' involvement in research by examining firstly rates of publication and secondly the views of trainees.

**Methods:** A list of all presentations to the Senior Trainees' Annual Research Symposium (STARS) meetings 2007-2009 was compiled and a detailed search made of major research databases. A questionnaire survey examined the views of attendees at the 2009 meeting.

**Results:** Fifty percent of presented work achieved publication. Feedback from symposia attendees was almost universally positive.

**Conclusions:** At a time of debate on the value of research sessions as part of higher training and a recent reduction in time allocated to research in the UK, we report on a thriving annual meeting. Research symposia for higher trainees were valued by participants and may be one useful means of encouraging trainee research.

**Key words:** higher training, research training, publication rates.

## Background

In the climate of financial pressures on the health service, questions have been raised regarding the place of protected research time in psychiatric training.<sup>1</sup> Significant reform to psychiatric training occurred in the UK in 2007 which included reduction of the traditional allocation of protected research time for higher trainees from two sessions weekly to one.

However, participation in research is still deemed an important component of psychiatric training, and this is reflected by the inclusion of research outcomes in the most recent competency framework for progression.<sup>2</sup>

In Ireland, the time designated for research in higher training remains two sessions weekly.<sup>3</sup> Participation in research is encouraged earlier in training, with research accomplishments forming part of the criteria for appointment to higher training posts.

Concerns have been raised regarding a perceived lack of productivity from protected research sessions with trainees failing to achieve publication.<sup>4</sup> However, very little is known about rates of publication among psychiatric trainees. A UK study found that the majority of training programme directors and specialist registrars (SpRs) felt that protected time was not used adequately.<sup>1</sup> A survey of trainees in Scotland found over half would rather use the time for alternative objectives.<sup>5</sup> Such objectives could include special interest, achieving a higher degree or meeting other training competencies. The evidence base regarding interest in research among psychiatry trainees is scarce, however, a review of papers published between 1987 and 2004 has indicated high levels of interest in research participation.<sup>6</sup> Fogel<sup>6</sup> reviews potential barriers to trainee research which included identification of a manageable research topic, lack of structured research training, lack of time, and lack of a mentor. A recent review of the current state of psychiatric research training in Ireland offers suggestions to encourage research, including monthly meetings with a mentor, clear research objectives set out at the beginning of placements and local opportunities to share research projects such as newsletters.<sup>7</sup>

In this paper we firstly present our experience of organising an annual inter-regional research symposium for psychiatric higher trainees in Scotland including trainee feedback, and secondly we describe rates of publication following the meeting.

The Senior Trainees' Annual Research Symposium (STAR Symposium) is an annual full-day meeting which has been running in the North-East of Scotland since 2007. It is run for, and organised by, higher psychiatric trainees (SpRs and ST4-6s). Submissions are encouraged from the Grampian, Tayside and Highland training schemes, which in 2009 employed 29 higher trainees. Trainees are widely dispersed across a geographical area of more than 15,000 miles<sup>2</sup>, representing over half the Scottish mainland. The aim of the meeting is to provide local trainees with an opportunity to showcase the research they have undertaken during their allocated research sessions, as well as to allow others insight into the research pursuits of their peers, and to promote inter-regional collaboration.

Each year the meeting is held at an equidistant location from the two major centres of Aberdeen and Dundee. A judging panel of

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experts is invited from across the three regions, who offer constructive feedback following each 30 minute presentation. The panel awards a glass trophy for the presentation deemed to be the best, in terms of scientific rigour, quality of presentation and response to questions.

## Method

At the end of the 2009 meeting all attendees were given the opportunity to complete an anonymous evaluation form. For each question responses were requested on a five-point Likert rating scale from 'completely agree' to 'completely disagree'. There was also space for free text comment.

A list of all presentations to the STARS meetings between 2007 and 2009 was compiled, and study design, title, date of presentation and name of presenter were noted. A search of Medline, PsycINFO, Pubmed and Science Direct databases for author was carried out in November 2011. If no match was found for author name, keywords from the title were employed. If still no match was found, an email was sent to the presenter to confirm that the article had not been accepted for publication (November 2011). A match was accepted where there was similarity between title of presentation and paper, and where the presenter featured as an author. Journal of publication and date of publication were noted. The journal impact factor was retrieved from ISI Citation Index (<http://www.isiwebofknowledge.com>) from the publisher's website.

## Results

There were 20 presentations over the three years, presented by 19 individuals. All except one were clinical rather than scientific studies. No projects were randomized controlled trials. The titles and study design of all the presentations are shown in Table 1.

Eleven presentations were topics relating to general adult psychiatry, three old age, one forensic, two learning disability, one psychotherapy and two child and adolescent psychiatry. This distribution may simply reflect the number of trainees in each sub-specialty.

Regarding feedback from attendees at the 2009 meeting 22 from 24 questionnaire forms were returned (response rate 92%) and results collated. All respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'The STAR Symposium was useful'. Seventeen (77%) strongly agreed that they would attend another STAR symposium and all agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the symposium to a colleague. Sixteen (73%) agreed or strongly agreed that protected research sessions were vital to psychiatric training, with three (14%) neutral and three (14%) in disagreement.

Ten from 20 (50%) of the projects presented have been published or accepted for publication as a paper in a peer-reviewed journal. Four of these were first-author publications. Two individuals published two papers each from the project presented. The titles of journals and impact factor where available are shown in Table 2.

For one case the paper had been published at the time of presentation, for all others the mean time to publication (calculated to nearest full month) was 20.2 months (5 to 41). Of those unpublished, email responses stated the following reasons for non-publication: project failing to progress to submission, project abandoned and another pursued, paper not resubmitted after rejection, and no time available to complete research in Consultant post. No papers were still awaiting decisions following submission.

**Table 1** Presentations by design and title

Type of study	Abbreviated article title
Cohort/Cross sectional	"Anxiety and depression, I.Q. and early life privations in 64 year olds"
	"Validity of the PHQ-9, HADS and BDI-II to assess severity of depression in primary care"
	"Antipsychotic use in hospital and nursing home settings"
	"Neuropsychological function in childhood and early adolescence in boys with ADHD and controls"
	"Suicide in Grampian 2000-2005: Comparison with previous studies"
	"Psychometric properties of the PHQ9 in a UK general population sample"
Case Control	"The seasonality of bipolar affective disorder and comparison with a primary care sample"
Survey	"Attitudes and practice of GPs regarding Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 (Part 5)"
	"Fairness of interview: a Scottish perspective"
	"Staff attitudes to an integrated care pathway in a low security forensic unit"
	"Assessing fitness to plead in Scotland's Learning Disabled"
	"Views and prescribing patterns of cholinesterase inhibitors in Scotland"
	"Eating attitudes in college students in Mumbai, India"
Audit	"Patient information leaflets on psychotropic drugs: opinions and use by clinicians"
	"Use of a proforma for emergency assessments in General Adult Psychiatry"
	"Evaluating the clinical efficacy of a Therapeutic Community"
	"GP referrals for depression: Comparison against NICE guidelines"
Pilot	"Cardiac monitoring for Cholinesterase Inhibitors"
	"The functional pharmacogenetics of the carboxylesterase CES1 enzyme in ADHD"
	"The Niacin skin patch test in Schizophrenia"

**Table 2** Projects achieving publication

Type Of Study	No. Presented	No. Published Or Accepted	Name Of Journal	Publication Impact Factor
Cohort/cross sectional	6	3	Primary Care and Community Psychiatry	*
			British Journal of General Practice	2.07
			International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry	2.029
Case control	1	2	Journal of Affective Disorders	3.740
			Journal of Affective Disorders	3.740
Survey	7	4	Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health	N/A
			Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology	0.615
			Psychiatric Bulletin	N/A
			Geropsych	N/A
Audit	4	1	International Psychogeriatrics	2.478
Pilot	2	0		
Total	20	10		

\*Discontinued 2009.

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## Discussion

The publication rate of 50% described in this paper is greater than rates described previously for larger UK national meetings ranging from 24% (British Association of Maxillofacial Surgeons)<sup>8</sup> to 47% (Welsh Surgical Society).<sup>9</sup> A questionnaire survey of Scottish higher psychiatric trainees found that 66% had published work carried out in higher training.<sup>5</sup> The same proportion of respondents reported regular access to protected time for research. The most frequently reported barriers to research were lack of research skills, difficulties in generating ideas, access to technical support and lack of supervision.

It is our view that the publication rate described here is an indicator of reasonable productivity in research. We recognise that caveats exist regarding the use of publication rates as a measure of productivity. Publication is not the only measure of a meaningful research project, and even failed projects can offer a useful learning experience.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, research training should encourage meaningful contribution to the knowledge base rather than quantity of papers.

In the Grampian scheme, trainees are supported by a research mentor, with academic links through the University department of mental health. A Higher Trainee Research Peer group meets monthly. These supports for research activity, specifically recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, may well contribute to the productivity documented here.<sup>2</sup> Our experience indicates that the organisation of an annual research symposium is a further way to create structure, improve motivation and instill interest in undertaking research projects. Our data suggest that where these factors are present, a substantial proportion of (though not all) higher trainees will achieve publication.

At a time of decreased commitment to protected research time in the UK, we are pleased to report on an annual research meeting which trainees appear to value. The publication rate of presented papers infers productive use of protected research time. Consequently, we take the view that, despite ongoing service pressures, efforts should be made to maintain trainees' access to protected time for research.

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## Conflict of interest

None.

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