

Networking

To collaborate, or not to collaborate?: the WReN Rapid Guide to assessing research requests

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Context of development

The strategy and policy relating to modernization of NHS R&D places a strong emphasis on collaboration between NHS and academic organizations (Department of Health, 2000). For general practices participating in research the benefits may be somewhat minimal. Indeed, for some practices, their experience of research may be far from positive, providing little incentive to foster a R&D culture within practice. Barriers include lack of ownership, unrealistic expectations, lack of team motivation, time constraints and no feedback results (Gray, Woodward and Carter, 2001). As a research network our aims include increasing involvement in research amongst primary care practitioners and the facilitation of research across organizational boundaries. In an attempt to reduce barriers to developing collaborative research, we organized some workshops entitled 'Research in Primary Care: Getting it right for Everyone' and extended invitations to researchers and health care professionals from a wide variety of disciplines. During the course of the workshop, NHS Staff and academics introduced each other to their own priorities and constraints with respect to research. The trials and tribulations of the Universities' Research Assessment Exercise came face to face with the realities of a practice nurse's research-free contract and the economic realities of being a self-employed optometrist.

Members of primary care teams described feeling overwhelmed by 'hundreds of requests' to

collaborate in research, a sentiment that has been echoed in several studies (Macpherson and Bisset, 1995; Kaner, Haighton and McAvoy, 1998). In our own work we found that this perception was exacerbated by nonscientific requests masquerading as research, including commercial questionnaires, needs assessments and satisfaction surveys (Moore, Smith and Post, 1999). In response to requests from practitioners seeking guidance on how to select wisely from the numerous requests they receive, we devised the WReN Rapid Guide to Assessing Research Requests (Figure 1). It is a simple multicoloured checklist designed to help practice teams assess the quality and feasibility of the research requests they receive thus allowing them to make an informed decision about which research projects to collaborate with. The guide comprises of 12 questions addressing:

- Relevance of the research question
- Potential generalisability of results
- Type and amount of co-operation required
- Ethical and data protection issues

The guide also prompts the reviewer to ensure that all the appropriate colleagues have been consulted before a decision about practice participation is made. If the decision to participate is negative the guide encourages to feed back to the researcher their reasons for not collaborating. Apart from a few startled academics the Rapid Guide has been very helpful in increasing the dialogue between researchers and practitioners locally! Many researchers now use the Rapid Guide as a checklist when designing their studies and developing materials for potential collaborators in the NHS.

The Rapid Guide has been adopted widely by

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The WReN Rapid Guide to Assessing Research Requests

Name of researcher(s)?
Title of Project?

THE RESEARCH QUESTION		
No	1. Is the research question clearly stated	Yes
No	2. Is it relevant to primary care	Yes
No	3. Is the research topic important to the NHS	Yes
No	4. Does the project have funding? (from whom?)	Yes
THE RESEARCH METHOD		
No	5. Is the method clear?	Yes
No	6. Will the findings be generalisable?	Yes
No	7. Is the project feasible in primary care?	Yes
No	8. Is the support (financial, training or practical) offered to the practice sufficient?	Yes
Reject Application or enquire further before making decision	IMPACT ON PRACTISE	
	9. Does the project reflect the existing interests and research activities of the practice?	Yes
	10. Would the impact on the practice be reasonable and not excessive (e.g. on workload, staff, patients, research)?	Yes
ETHICS		
No	11. Does the project have approval?	Yes
No	12. Does the study maintain patient confidentiality, e.g. details of patients are not disclosed until they have consented (see over?)	Yes
DECISION		As a preponderance of yes, suggest this is a quality and worthwhile project for participation
Have you invited other team members in the decision process? Please ensure that the people who will be most involved (often the practice nurse) have been consulted		
What is your final decision?		

Even if you decide not to participate, please feed back your decision to the researchers with your reasons and comments. That way you can improve the quality of the research requests distributed

Figure 1 WReN Rapid Guide to assessing research requests.

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WReN practices. Whilst recognizing its limitations, we feel that this simple structured approach to reviewing projects can help change the culture or research, preventing academics from regarding primary care as their 'community laboratory', and practices from feeling their involvement in research is one of 'constriction'! Whilst the advent of research management and governance will make a major contribution to ensuring the quality of research (Department of Health, 2001), there will remain the need for a guide to assist practitioners who are contemplating 'To collaborate, or not to collaborate, that is the question?'

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