

Comment

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Practice-based research comes of age

The first *Dental Update* editorial on practice-based research was published over a decade ago,¹ with one of the first articles on the problems of carrying out research in dental practice (also suggesting some solutions) being published in 1993.² During the ensuing years, practice-based research has grown from representing a small proportion of articles published in journals that publish research, to becoming a significant player in the world of dental research. This is particularly apparent in the USA, where a grant of \$75 million was awarded, in 2005, for the founding and sustaining of a number of practice-based research networks.

The International Association for Dental Research (IADR), based in the USA, is the organization that promotes dental research worldwide. It does so by the organization of networks and groups of like-minded dental researchers and by holding regional and international research meetings where presenters can discuss their findings with other researchers – these may be clinicians or scientists (or a combination of both!). Such meetings are important forums for discussion, with the researchers having their research subdivided into groups, such as Dental Materials, Dental Education and so forth. Last year saw the formation, at the IADR meeting in Toronto, of a world network for practice-based research, this being chaired by Ken Eaton, while in September, at the Pan-European Region meeting of the IADR, a European network for practice-based research was founded, with the authors of this *Comment* being the interim chair and secretary/treasurer. This group has initially comprised over 20 members from six countries over Europe and it is hoped that our activities will attract a substantial number of members in due course. This important step gives practice-based research a true discussion forum, but, even more importantly, represents a group in which the members can support one another in the promotion of research in the dental practice arena.

Why bother? Dental practice is the real world, where real patients from all walks of life are treated by real clinicians with a wide variety of undergraduate and postgraduate backgrounds. Dental practices are geared up to the efficient treatment of patients, so large numbers of treatments (such as restorations or therapies) may be carried out and then reviewed. However, funding needs to be available for the reimbursement of the practitioners whose time may be spent on research rather than patient treatment.

Therein lies the difficulty, but readers of journals which publish research may have noted that these difficulties are starting to be overcome.^{3,4}

In the past, only 15% of medical interventions were supported by scientific evidence⁵ and the effectiveness of dental procedures was probably not much different. Dental practitioners therefore have the potential to identify the areas that need research evidence most because of the high volume of treatment that they carry out. By helping to train practitioners in the essentials of research, they will become the researchers of the future, with their practices being the clinical equivalent of dental laboratories. It is important that the practitioner researchers are fully involved in all aspects of projects, including the applications for ethical approval, and are not simply seen as data collectors. The formation of practice-based research groups, such as the PREP (Product Research and Evaluation by Practitioners) Panel in the UK can help provide experience in many aspects of clinical research, and most dental schools, along with the newly formed network, will be happy to help practitioners who wish to undertake research in their practices.

We have written to over 30 executives from companies involved in the development and manufacture of dental materials,

dental devices and therapeutic products to advise them of the formation of the new European network and have received a favourable response from many. It is to be hoped that they will recognize the formation of the network as the valuable resource that it is and use it for the assessment of the effectiveness of their products, at the same time helping to develop research in dental practice. Hopefully, readers of *Dental Update* will contact the network website if they wish to become involved (www.per-pbrn.eu). Practice-based research has truly come of age!

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