

Making the case for research

Resource kit for doctors

May 2025



The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) believes that all doctors (resident, locally employed, specialty, specialist and associate specialist doctors and consultants) should have the opportunity for protected time in their job plans or training programmes to undertake research.

This RCP resource kit will help you, as a physician, to:

- make the case for research time in meetings where your job plan or training programme is discussed
- understand what the RCP is doing to campaign for research for all
- learn how to get into research.

Despite positive developments to the healthcare and life sciences landscapes over recent years, it has become harder, not easier, for clinicians to participate in research.

The 2023 [Lord O'Shaughnessy review into commercial clinical trials in the UK](#) noted that 'research is not systematically prioritised by or within the NHS' and that 'doctors, nurses and NHS organisations lack incentives to take part in research, especially when it is commercially funded'.

The 2025 Office for the Strategic Coordination of Health Research (OSCHR) [report](#) on Clinical Researchers in the UK calls for urgent action to address falling numbers of clinical researchers and meet the needs of the nation's health and economy.

Why research?

Clinical research provides a variety of benefits to patients, doctors, the health service and society. It is key to improving care and outcomes for patients, driving innovation in healthcare, increasing productivity in the NHS, and improving job satisfaction for doctors.

For every £1 invested into medical research, a further 25p is returned every year, forever. There is evidence to show that research-active hospitals have lower mortality – not just for patients directly involved in research – and there is less staff turnover.

How do I make the case for doing research in my meetings?

Over the past few years, there have been developments from UK government and other stakeholders to strengthen the role of research in the NHS and advocate for clinical research to be a bigger priority. You should use these to make the case for your participation in research.

The Health and Care Act 2022

In England, the Health and Care Act 2022 set new legal duties on research for integrated care boards (ICBs):

- 'Each ICB must facilitate or promote research on matters relevant to the health service and the health service must use evidence obtained from research.'
- 'Assessing how well an ICB has discharged these duties on research is part of NHS England's annual performance assessment of every ICB.'

ICBs and trusts in England must also use their joint forward plan to describe how the ICB will discharge its duty in respect of research.

NHS England then published guidance for integrated care systems in March 2023 on how to maximise the benefits of research. This should mean that embedding research is a bigger priority for the NHS in England – regions across the country are expected to take action to enable clinicians to undertake research, and for the outcomes of research to inform services.

General Medical Council *Good medical practice*

Good medical practice sets out the professional standards and behaviours expected of doctors. Paragraph 10 of the 2024 update of *Good medical practice* says:

- 'Research is vital in improving our understanding of health conditions, and increasing the availability of options for effective prevention, treatment, and care. You should consider opportunities to conduct or participate in research that may benefit current and/or future patients, and help to improve the health of the population.'

Joint NIHR (National Institute for Health and Care Research) and RCP position statement *Making research everybody's business*

Published in 2022, the joint NIHR and RCP position statement recommended that trusts, health boards and integrated care systems should:

- ringfence time for research in job plans for those who want a substantive research leadership role
- develop strong links between medical directors, research and development (R&D) directors and chief executives to secure buy-in for clinical research at a senior level

- encourage support for research to be recognised as part of direct clinical activity and reward involvement of such through local and national awards
- ensure that multidisciplinary workforce planning encompasses those who support research. This should focus on increasing capacity, developing skills and maximising the contribution of the wider health workforce
- implement proportionate training requirement for those involved in research. The statement said that many of its recommendations were relevant to other UK nations and should be considered by equivalent authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

OSCHR report *Clinical researchers in the UK: reversing the decline*

In January 2025, the OSCHR commissioned a report, *Clinical researchers in the UK: reversing the decline*, which looked at reasons for the decline in number of clinical researchers, the value of clinical research and actions to support and expand the clinical researcher workforce. The report made a range of recommendations, including:

- making the career pathway more flexible
- having greater and more visible leadership and mentorship
- embedding research as a key performance indicator (KPI) in all NHS trusts at a board level.

If implemented, these actions will help to expand and improve support for clinicians wanting to undertake research in the NHS and those wanting to pursue clinical academia.

Campaigning for change

Ensuring that UK health policy is led by the latest research and innovation is a priority for the RCP. We have published resources to help improve access to research, including our *Research for all* report in 2016, our *research strategy* in 2020 and our joint position statement with NIHR in 2022, *Making research everybody's business*. Research was a key area in our 2024 pre-election *Manifesto for medicine* to influence the 2024 general election.

We survey physicians about clinical research. All our surveys have found that time is the biggest barrier to doctors doing more research. Our 2023 *UK consultant physician census questions on research* found that time was the biggest barrier for 52 % of respondents. In our *January 2020 survey of over 1,100 RCP members and fellows*, 53 % of respondents cited time as their main barrier. The 2023 RCP UK consultant physician census questions on research found that:

- 41 % of respondents said they undertook research (consistent with 40 % in 2022)
- 36 % of respondents said they were interested in undertaking research (38 % in 2022).

There continues to be untapped research potential in the physician workforce. The RCP is campaigning for UK government and the NHS to make changes so that doctors have ringfenced time for research, and clinical academic careers are supported at all stages.

Our 2020 *Research for all* report, based on RCP members' experiences of clinical research, recommended that:

- NHS trusts, royal colleges and research organisations must do more to highlight the simple ways that all clinicians can become research active

- with backing at board level, NHS trusts should support a highly visible R&D function in their organisation that coordinates high-quality research and clearly explains the different ways that clinicians can become involved in research and what support is available
- NHS trusts need to explore viable ways to allow clinicians more time to participate in patient-facing research through job planning, whether this is on an individual or team basis
- NHS trusts must do more to publicise research-focused mentoring schemes, especially to those under-represented in research
- royal colleges, education bodies, the NIHR and trusts should work to provide alternative routes into research to widen participation for those who feel that they don't have the relevant knowledge or skills.

In 2023, the [Lord O'Shaughnessy review into commercial clinical trials in the UK](#) set out a wide range of recommendations to improve the clinical trials landscape in the UK, including:

- annual R&D targets for the NHS at every level

- income generated by commercial sponsors should be explicitly directed to units and departments leading trials in NHS sites to provide direct financial incentives to take part in commercial trials
- the NHS should use the Long Term Workforce Plan and UK Recovery, Resilience and Growth (RRG) Research Workforce Strategy to establish a clinical trials career path for training critical roles for research.

The [previous UK government committed](#) to publishing the RRG Research Workforce Strategy.

The RCP will continue to push for this clinical research workforce strategy to be published by the current UK government.

In 2025, NHS England [announced a postgraduate medical training review](#) to be overseen by the national medical director and the chief medical officer. Responding to the news, the RCP's Resident Doctor Committee co-chair, [Dr Anthony Martinelli](#), said that the review must cover a range of concerns impacting the next generation of doctors, including 'declining opportunities to pursue academic medicine'. The RCP will push for research to be covered in this review and for research to be an integral part of training for all.

How can I get into research?

NIHR [research skills e-learning](#)

The RCP partnered with NIHR and seven other royal colleges to produce four e-learning modules for clinicians to build knowledge and understanding of practical clinical research topics. These modules have been designed for health professionals interested in pursuing a clinical research career and are appropriate for those with little or no research experience.

- 1 [Getting involved in clinical research](#) in the NHS
- 2 [Getting up to speed](#) with the scientific language and processes of clinical trials
- 3 [Working with](#) investigational medicines
- 4 [How clinical research interacts](#) with populations, public health and prevention

Each module provides 2 CPD points and takes around 2 hours to complete, making it easy for physicians to learn more about the basics of clinical research in a quick and flexible way.

Clinician Researcher Credentials Framework

The RCP, the NIHR and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges have developed a clinician researcher credentials framework of master's-level clinical research delivery leadership qualifications.

These qualifications provide learners with the necessary skills and confidence to lead and support clinical research delivery. There are three types of qualification – each builds on the one before it. The first is the postgraduate certificate, followed by the postgraduate diploma, and finally a master's degree. These courses are part time and designed to fit alongside clinicians' busy schedules.

Four universities are currently hosting the programme:

- > King's College London
- > University of Newcastle
- > University of Exeter
- > University of Sheffield.

Those already working in research and those with little to no research experience can apply.

The Whitney-Wood scholarship

Founded in 2020, the Whitney-Wood scholarship funds qualified RCP members to undertake groundbreaking research. The scholarship offers up to £50,000 annually toward research projects in all areas of health and medicine, with a particular focus on cancer research. Its various alumni have published their work in esteemed journals and received prestigious awards and clinical positions.

WoW entry-level research scholarships

In partnership with Wellbeing of Women (WoW), these awards fund UK predoctoral physicians in projects aimed to improve outcomes for women, girls and babies related to women's reproductive and gynaecological health. The aim of these awards is to enable candidates to be exposed to a research environment and to obtain pilot data that will enhance an application for a research fellowship (PhD or MD).

RCP Wolfson Intercalated Awards

These awards are aimed at students at selected medical schools who are undertaking outstanding work and likely to pursue a medical research career. They are determined by nominations from the selected universities and enable students to take a 1-year academic course partway through their medical degree.

Flexible Portfolio Training

Flexible Portfolio Training (FPT) is a flexibility initiative that allows postgraduate resident doctors in England the ability to have 1 day per week (or 20% time equivalent) protected for personal and professional development in one of four pathways:

- > Clinical informatics pathway
- > Medical education pathway
- > Clinical service improvement (formerly the Quality improvement pathway)
- > Research pathway.

The research pathway aims to provide resident doctors with a wide range of experiences to build their skills in research, focusing on six capabilities:

- 1 understanding research methodologies
- 2 research governance and ethical approval
- 3 presentation
- 4 publications
- 5 participation in clinical research
- 6 data collection, analysis and management.

The availability of FPT may vary by local education training board and specialty. FPT was initially launched as a pilot initiative within higher specialty training, offered jointly by then Health Education England (HEE) and the RCP. The scheme is now managed by the Workforce, Training and Education Directorate at NHS England – it was fully transferred to them once the pilot phase concluded.

NIHR Associate Principal Investigator Scheme

The RCP has endorsed this scheme, which is a 6-month in-work training opportunity, providing practical experience for health and care professionals starting their research career. During this time, health professionals will work closely with a local principal investigator (an individual responsible for the conduct of a research study) to contribute towards the delivery of a study, alongside receiving mentorship and completing a learning pathway on NIHR Learn. The scheme aims to develop health professionals to become principal investigators in the future.

Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training

NIHR runs free online training courses on GCP, aimed at those supporting clinical research delivery in the NHS, UK universities and other publicly funded organisations in England. GCP is the agreed international standard for conducting clinical research and is necessary for anyone delivering a study. Certification is provided on completion of the training, and introduction, refresher and consolidation courses are available depending on your needs.

Clinical Academic Training Hub (CATCH)

This web resource provides information on clinical academic careers by promoting a wide variety of career options available across multiple healthcare disciplines. It offers practical advice on pursuing clinical academic pathways throughout all four nations of the UK, showcases inspiring clinical academics at various career stages to help build aspirations, and fosters stronger links between clinical practice and academia.

Wales Clinical Academic Training (WCAT) Fellowship Programme

In Wales, WCAT Fellowships support early-career doctors in Wales to become future leaders in clinical, health and biomedical sciences. The programme offers integrated clinical training to CCT level and a 3-year research project aimed at earning a PhD, alongside training in clinical and academic research and development of teaching skills. Those on the programme receive mentorship, study leave and networking opportunities.

Contact us

If you would like to discuss anything set out in this resource kit, please contact us via policy@rcp.ac.uk.

The *Making the case for research* 2025 RCP resource kit was developed through the RCP Research and Academic Medicine Committee, which comprises the RCP academic vice president, external clinical academics, and membership and Patient and Carer Network representatives. The document was approved by RCP Council prior to publication.