

From the President
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Dr Janet Wisely
Chief Executive
Health Research Authority
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Dear Janet,

Supporting research by students in the NHS

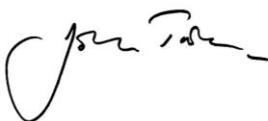
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the report from your Working Group on how we best support educational research in the NHS. I am aware that the Medical Schools Council is preparing a detailed response to the report's recommendations, in consultation with its members. I do not want to duplicate its efforts but I believe that it is important for the Academy to write in support of research by students.

If the NHS is to undertake research and utilise its outcomes, the Academy believes that we must foster a research culture in all clinicians entering the NHS, not just those with an interest in pursuing a career in academic medicine. This must begin at undergraduate level. Our INSPIRE project (funded by the Wellcome Trust), seeks to inspire medical and dental undergraduates to consider a research career and also to build the interest of all medical and dental students in research.¹ We are seeking to raise the bar for student research and to develop best practice. We are providing an umbrella under which diverse stakeholders engage to ensure students have the very best research opportunities and experiences.

I believe that the participation of undergraduates in research involving patients reinforces the concept that medicine operates in an evidence-based culture and that a spirit of enquiry should underpin their careers, whether they undertake research themselves as a core element of their future working life or not. Engaging in research with patients will help students to understand both the potential and the limitations of such research. It would undermine the fact that research is integral to medical practice to debar students, under appropriate supervision, from engaging with patients for research purposes. They will of course already be engaging with patients as part of their training. I therefore do not support of the report's recommendation that students should be discouraged from undertaking research involving direct contact with patients. I do however agree that the responsibility for ensuring that proposals are of sufficient quality before submission for review should rest with the supervisors.

As you are aware, the Academy is very supportive of the HRA's efforts to streamline the regulation and governance of health research. Improving the quality of applications for health research carried out by students is clearly part of this streamlining if they are placing a significant burden on Research Ethics Committees and Trusts. If you plan to initiate a more focused discussion about the report's conclusions once you have analysed the responses to it I would be happy to discuss how the Academy might assist.

With kind regards,



¹ <http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk/INSPIRE>