

Supporting non-medical staff to combine a role in research and clinical practice

Lessons learned from an NHS community trust

Hiley, J¹, Burt, C² and Poole, M²

¹West Midlands Clinical Academic Careers Programmes, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

²Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Introduction

NHS providers play a crucial role in supporting the development of research capability and clinical academic potential of non-medical clinical staff. This poster will outline how an NHS community trust has supported its staff to develop their clinical academic career, in the context of national research training pathways (Fig. 1) and the regional clinical academic careers programmes delivered in the West Midlands.

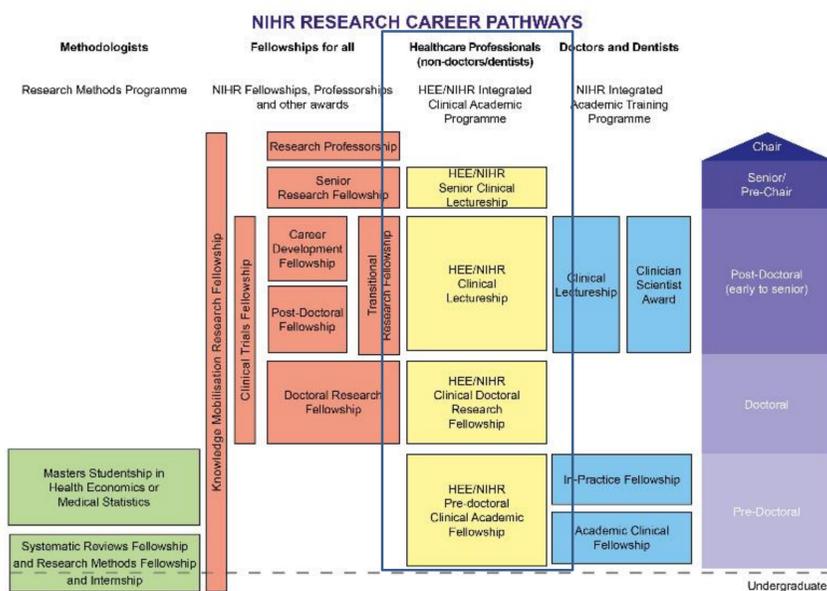


Fig. 1 - NIHR Research Pathways (highlighted is the HEE/NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic Programme for non-medical healthcare professions)

Background

There is a greater national impetus to develop the research capacity and capability of non-medical clinical staff in the NHS (Health Education England (HEE), 2015; Willis, 2015). HEE and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) provide a funded research training pathway to support the development of non-medical healthcare professionals to establish a clinical academic career (NIHR, 2017; Fig. 1).

Funded by HEE, the West Midlands clinical academic careers programmes align with this pathway, providing skills training needed to undertake research in practice, and develop high quality applications for research funding at pre-masters and pre-doctoral levels.

The programmes provide support over a 6-9 month period (30 days each) at no cost to participants or their employers:

- ✓ Clinical Academic Internship Programme - a stepping stone onto the clinical academic career pathway
- ✓ Masters to Doctorate Bridging Programme - bridges the gap between masters and doctoral level study

For more information on the West Midlands clinical academic programmes please visit: <http://www.birminghamhealthpartners.co.uk/education/clinical-academic-careers-programmes/>

An organisational perspective to embed clinical academic careers in an NHS community trust

The Research and Development team at Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BCHCT) has been scoping the development of clinical academic careers within the organisation for 3 years. They are very supportive of the clinical academic careers programmes for non-medical healthcare staff.

The team believes that clinical academic careers will bring benefits to the Trust in supporting the following:

- Contribute to clinical priority setting, healthcare quality, efficiencies and new models of care
- Improve the relationship with commissioners by providing relevant evidence
- Provide financial stability for research via Research Capability Funding
- Promote Trust reputation for research through research publications, networks and partnerships
- Improve staff retention
- Ensure the Trust aligns with Department of Health priorities and strategy

However, there are barriers currently present which limit the ability for staff to undertake programmes and the subsequent positive impact of clinical academic careers on service, which include:

- There are very often no suitable staff available to backfill into posts due to their specialist nature and often services are already short staffed before that particular staff member engages with the programme
- HEE funding has been put in place for the staff to be released but in most cases there is no pathway for them to return to afterwards to continue their research journey unless they leave the NHS
- Financial constraints are present in many areas

A clinician's perspective

Marilyn, Community Paediatric Physiotherapist, works at BCHCT. She undertook the Masters to Doctorate Bridging Programme (MDBP) between Nov 2016 and July 2017.

Organisational support

Marilyn received support from her line manager to attend the MDBP as part of her clinical academic career development:

"I'm really lucky that my Manager is really excited about what I'm doing, she can see that it's made a difference to the team"

The main barriers Marilyn faced was having the time to undertake the work required alongside her busy clinical role and the need to streamline funding for research into R&D; the latter has now improved with the input of a dedicated finance manager for R&D.

Impact of the clinical academic careers programmes



Fig. 2 - Programme participants 2016

The MDBP gave Marilyn a range of valuable skills. She particularly valued the support from her supervisory team and learning from the teaching sessions, including effective writing and leadership skills:

"I hadn't had any formal leadership training before. It really made me stop and think about my interactions with people. Before I have a meeting or conversation, I stop and consider what angle I am going to approach it from, whereas I don't know that I did that before, and it's been very effective"

And it developed her skills to interrogate the evidence to improve patient care:

"The first question I asked was, what's the evidence behind it, what do we know... I don't think that, four or five years ago that would have been the case, but now it is"

As a result of the programme Marilyn also noted:

- The successful dissemination of her academic work including a systematic review and poster presentations
- Improvements to her project management of an NIHR portfolio study as Chief Investigator
- Supporting colleagues to take their clinical academic careers forward
- A wider understanding of the requirements of an NIHR funding application for Clinical Doctoral Research Fellowship (CDRF)
- Awarded funding from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
- She has been invited to speak at the Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists annual conference about her research journey
- She has been invited as a local research collaborator for a 5 year NIHR research programme - ActiveCHILD - led by Newcastle University
- Successful NIHR i4i connect grant application in partnership with Sussex Community NHS Trust and an SME

Marilyn has built the team for her NIHR CDRF application (the next step on the HEE/NIHR ICA Programme), which she is applying for this year.

Conclusions and recommendations

NHS providers play a crucial role in supporting the development of research capability and clinical academic potential of non-medical clinical staff. Local initiatives can illustrate how best to achieve this.

Top tips:

- ✓ Ensure that programme participants align their research with NHS departmental and Trust priorities
- ✓ Trusts can create a pathway, in collaboration with local academic organisations, to capitalise on staff skills and knowledge on return to work following the programme
- ✓ Those designing the clinical academic programme should have greater engagement with NHS managers on the process, impact and benefits

References

- Health Education England (HEE) (2015). *Clinical Academic Careers Framework: A framework for optimising clinical academic careers across health care professions.* (HEE Online).
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- Willis P (2015). *Raising the Bar. The Shape of Caring: A review of the future Education and training of registered nurses and care assistants.* (HEE Online).