

News from the Health Services Research Centre



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Over the last two years, the National Institute of Academic Anaesthesia (NIAA) and the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) have worked together to establish a Health Services Research Centre (HSRC) for anaesthesia and related specialties, and this is located at the RCoA.

An HSRC for anaesthesia is long overdue. As a specialty, we represent the largest single group of hospital doctors within the NHS, and yet we struggle to describe clearly the quality of the care we give, or the impact that our activities have upon patients. Other specialties are ahead of us in this respect. The Clinical Effectiveness Unit of the Royal College of Surgeons of England was established in 1990, and the Royal College of Physicians established a similar unit in 1999.

So what is health services research, and what might an HSRC achieve?

Health services research (HSR) is defined as research with the aim of improving patient outcomes (safety, effectiveness and experience), and evaluating the organisation, management, finances, and delivery of healthcare. It encompasses clinical epidemiology and clinical trials to demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions (phase III, health technology assessment). Basic science (animal and 'bench-top') studies and early stage safety and efficacy clinical trials (phases I and II) do not fall within this definition.

Within the clinical areas of anaesthesia (including perioperative medicine, pain and the anaesthetic sub-specialties), the HSRC will have three aims:

- ▶ Initiating and co-ordinating large scale clinical audits.
- ▶ methodological innovation in clinical measurement.
- ▶ conducting and facilitating research to improve patient outcomes.

As an early objective, the HSRC is exploring the feasibility of a national outcomes network for peri-operative care, analogous to the case-

mix programme run by the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (ICNARC). The HSRC will also encompass the National Audit Project (NAP) programme, and Dr Tim Cook has joined the HSRC board to oversee this work. Plans for NAP5 and NAP6 are being developed at the time of writing. Preliminary methodological work will focus on describing current practice and available measures, by conducting a national survey of anaesthetic departments. A cluster of systematic reviews of peri-operative risk assessment and outcome measures is nearing completion. The resources of the HSRC will also be used to address specific research questions within the remit of HSR, and to assist investigators throughout the UK with the development of multicentre clinical trials and other large studies.

In order to assist the delivery of these goals, the HSRC is forming an academic partnership with the UCLH/UCL Comprehensive Biomedical Research Centre (CBRC). Uniquely, amongst the five CBRCs funded by the National Institute for Health Research, this centre has both anaesthesia and HSR specialist themes. This partnership will jointly fund an HSR researcher and a statistician, to support the activities of the HSRC. A scientific advisory board, chaired by Professor Kathy Rowan (Director of ICNARC), will provide guidance and strategic advice.

The HSRC will also build a role in training and education in HSR, and in developing the national anaesthesia research portfolio. As a first step, the first UK Peri-operative Research Forum was held at the RCoA on Monday, 13 September.

The HSRC is here as a resource for the whole anaesthetic community. Please help us when we seek information from you or your department; we will be here to help you to answer novel questions in anaesthesia.

If you have any comments or suggestions or would like to be involved in HSRC work, please email hsrc@rcoa.ac.uk.