

Research activity among trainees on Merseyside

T. L. STANWAY, Royal Liverpool University Hospital, Liverpool L7 8XP

An active interest in research aids understanding of research methods helps in the reading of scientific papers, and is rapidly becoming a prerequisite for career progression in psychiatry.

In their audit of research activity among psychiatric trainees, Junaid & Daly (1991) reported a high output from trainees in the North West Division. They emphasised the need to analyse what is contributing to this success. Professor Goldberg (1991) has described the value placed on research experience in Manchester, where the Academic Department runs a course providing trainees with ideas for research projects, and with suitable supervisors.

The Mersey Training Scheme is extensive, being responsible for the training of all registrar and most SHO grade psychiatrists in the Region. As such it forms a large part of the North West Division. In 1987, Davidson & Abou-Saleh described a survey of research activity among trainees in Mersey Region. Their recommendations for change included the amalgamation of training schemes throughout the Region, the establishment of a senior registrar research tutor, and improvement of communication between the Academic Department and NHS consultants. Since then there has been considerable reorganisation of psychiatric training in the region. This paper describes a reassessment of trainees' research activity, assesses the effectiveness of changes made over the last five years, and makes recommendations for further improvement.

The study

A questionnaire was sent to all SHO and registrar grade trainees on the training scheme asking about research projects they were doing and work they had published. Case reports were counted as publications and the term "research project" was taken to include audit. There was a response rate of 63% (40 out of a possible 64 replies), with almost equal representation from all four years of psychiatric training.

Findings

Of the trainees who replied, 97% were interested in doing research. Seven (18%) trainees had not yet started, 6 (15%) were planning a project, 20 (50%) were actively involved, and 7 (17%) had had at least one piece of work published. Looked at

TABLE I
Comparison of research activity among trainees in 1987 and 1991

	<i>Not doing research</i>	<i>Involved in project or work published</i>
Peripheral scheme 1987	85%	15%
University linked scheme 1987	72%	28%
Amalgamated scheme 1991	33%	67%

another way, 90% of post-membership and 50% of pre-membership trainees were doing research.

Over the five years the numbers of trainees involved in research projects increased, from 15% of those on the peripheral schemes and 28% on the University linked scheme in 1987, to 67% of trainees on the amalgamated scheme in 1991 (see Table I).

Among trainees involved in a project, 86% had received help from local consultants, 41% from the Academic Department of Psychiatry, and 23% from senior registrars and peers. Help from the Academic Department was most often in the form of statistical advice. On occasions when local consultants had been unable to help they had directed trainees to others who could offer advice.

The University of Liverpool encourages trainees to start working for a higher degree at an early stage. All trainees on the MRC Psych course sit an entrance exam to the MPsychMed at the end of their first year. However, only 5 (8%) of the trainees who replied to the survey had gone to register for the Masters Degree.

Comment

Although trainees with an interest in research are more likely to have responded, the results, which show an increase in trainee research since 1987, are still encouraging. The relatively large number of trainees from the region who presented work at the 1992 Spring Quarterly Meeting of the College (four short papers and three poster presentations) provides confirmation of the results.

In 1987 training in psychiatry in Merseyside was undertaken by a University linked training scheme and several smaller peripheral schemes. The disparity of research activity between trainees on the

central and peripheral rotations contributed to the decision to amalgamate schemes. It would appear that, at least in terms of trainee research, this change has been a success. However, the survey also suggests that most trainees still turn first to local consultants for advice about possible research projects, and much research in Mersey is initiated anyway from the Academic Centre. Since the training schemes were amalgamated trainees have had the opportunity to rotate widely throughout the region. They are able to meet consultants with a variety of research interests who may be prepared to help them get started with their own projects. It could be this, rather than increased contact with the major teaching hospitals, which has stimulated research among the trainees in the region.

Following the 1987 survey the post of senior registrar research tutor was established, and anecdotal evidence suggests that this has been a success. A similar post for junior trainees is now being created. In view of the large number of trainees involved a single tutor would have a limited role. A major part of his or her work is expected to be in co-ordinating trainees with suitable supervisors throughout the region.

Formal teaching of research methods is currently done as a block on the MRC Psych course. Trainees have criticised the teaching, finding it difficult to relate the theory to their on-going research projects. It is hoped that in the future the course will be revised to allow for more small group discussion and experiential learning of research methods and statistics.

Trainees have been actively involved in planning changes to the course as well as in discussions about the establishment of a research tutor post.

There has not been a significant increase in the number of trainees registering for a higher degree

since 1987. The MPsychMed is a thesis-based degree and, as such it is unlikely to be completed before trainees become senior registrars. With the ever increasing demand for trainees to have published work before they apply for SR posts it seems that many decide to devote their time to smaller projects which can be finished more quickly.

Conclusions

In summary, there has been a large increase in the amount of research undertaken by trainees in Merseyside since 1987. This may in part be due to the amalgamation of all training schemes in the region, which gives a chance to meet consultants with a wide range of research interests as they rotate through their jobs.

Changes that may further stimulate research are a revision of the course on research methods, and the appointment of a research tutor who will help co-ordinate the interests of trainees and supervisors around the region.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr I. A. Davidson for his helpful comments during the preparation of this paper.

References

- DAVIDSON, I. A. & ABOU-SALEH, M. T. (1987) Survey of research activity by trainees in the Mersey region. *Bulletin of the Royal College of Psychiatrists*, **11**, 94–95.
- JUNAID, O. & DALY, R. (1991) An audit of research activity among trainee psychiatrists. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **15**, 353–354.
- GOLDBERG, D. (1991) Training in the North West (letter). *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **15**, 775–776.

Psychiatric Bulletin (1993), **17**, 724

International Association of Forensic Psychiatry

The Second International Conference of the International Association for Forensic Psychotherapy will be held from 26–28 March 1993 at the Scientific Societies Lecture Theatre, Savile Row, London W1 with the theme **Psychodynamics and the Adolescent and Female Offender**. The programme will include individual, group and team based clinical and theoretical presentations by professionals working in the field. Invited speakers include: Dr R. du Bois, Mr Don Campbell, Professor Percy Cohen, Dr Jeremy Coid, Dr Christopher Cordess, Dr Murray Cox, Dr Peter Gottlieb, Dr Arthur Hyatt-Williams, the Great Ormond Street Team – Working with Female

Abusers, Dr Tim Scannell, Ms Valerie Sinason, Professor Bart de Smith, Dr Leslie Sohn, Judge Stephen Tumim, Dr Estela Welldon and other speakers from overseas. A Conference Dinner will be held at the Great Hall at St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical School. Conference fee (which includes lunches and refreshments): IAFP members – £95.00; non-members – £130.00: Conference Dinner an additional £35.00. Further information: IAFP Secretary: Dr Tegwyn Williams, Caswell Clinic, Glanrhyd Hospital, Penyfai, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan CF31 4LN (telephone 0656 662179).