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The College of Radiographers Research Strategy for the next five years.

Summary

This article outlines the updated College of Radiographers (CoR) Research Strategy. This new research strategy will shape the approach to research from the radiography profession over the next five years. This will apply to all the profession and is aspirational and future thinking.

The updated research strategy is the fifth research strategy presented by the CoR. Over the last five years, there have been considerable developments within healthcare and healthcare research. As this article is being written we are still in the middle of a global pandemic (Covid-19) which has influenced all our lives. However, despite the challenges of the last year, we are in a stronger position as a profession with more radiographers working towards and gaining masters and doctoral level qualifications. There are more radiographers working in clinical academic roles and there has been further development of radiographers coordinating and delivering research as well as becoming research leaders.

This updated research strategy supports the radiography profession in delivering research-based practice over the next five years offering a framework within which radiographers can develop.

Introduction

It is well known that when individuals and organisations engage in research there are positive impacts on patient outcomes, patient mortality rates, and organisational performance^{1,2}, as well as the health care professionals delivering services³. So much so that research has become a key criterion for identifying well-led organisations as assessed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC)⁴. Research is essential to both provide and ensure that there is an up-to-date evidence base for the profession to support practice⁵. Recognising that a strong research culture should be embedded into the workplace as core business⁶, the radiography professional body seeks to encourage all its members to be involved in patient-focussed research and integrate evidence that advances improvements in patient care.

The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) offers a range of services to support members to undertake research. This support is underpinned by the College of Radiographers (CoR) research strategy that sets out the profession's plan for developing research capacity and research dissemination over the next five years. It details how the SCoR, its stakeholders, and its membership will deliver its intentions. The updated strategy, and its predecessors acknowledge the necessity for individual skills development, collaboration, knowledge translation and leadership. The CoR policy is that all members of the team are required to contribute to or use research. Therefore, the strategy is inclusive and is aimed at all levels of the profession from student to expert practitioners and at all levels of research, from novice through to research professorships. Service users and carers are also key contributors to both the research strategy and research within radiography, working in partnership with radiographers. To ensure professional congruence and clinical relevance, the strategy has been aligned with other Allied Health Professions

(AHPs)⁷ and the Government drivers across the UK⁸⁻¹⁰. It is aimed at both UK radiographers and external audiences, for example see Figure 1.

The updated research strategy is the fifth research strategy presented by the CoR. The previous editions of the strategy have shaped this edition and there are many elements that continue to be relevant from previous strategies. The previous strategy which was published in 2016¹¹ was developed following a Delphi study¹² and provided a detailed plan for research for the profession. A total of 133 priority topics were identified that reached consensus agreement across the three-round process. The priority topics were consolidated to five overarching research themes. Much of the content is still relevant now in 2021, and we acknowledge and are grateful for the work that was undertaken at that time.

Over the last five years, there have also been considerable developments within healthcare and healthcare research. One facet relevant to radiography is the use of innovative technologies such as genomics, digital medicine and artificial intelligence to benefit patients, which has prompted a new wave of research and conference topics on this subject matter. Another is the evolving patient pathways and new staff roles within radiography which are underpinned by evaluation of role boundaries and impact, particularly at advanced and consultant level practice where research is one of the pillars of practice, and which is importantly interwoven into practice for all roles at these higher levels. As we write this article we are still in the middle of a global pandemic (Covid-19) which has influenced all our lives. For many, the pandemic has meant that many research projects have been paused or stopped temporarily. However, positively, there have also been opportunities to develop new studies that focus on Covid-19 and provide knowledge that may help us to be better prepared for future pandemics. Throughout the pandemic, researchers and academics in radiography have demonstrated adaptability and innovation, making more use of technology and alternative communication platforms, e.g. conducting interviews and focus groups online or virtual conference presentations. Topical and timely research that reflects the current challenges and opportunities in radiography will continue to be supported through the CoR funding streams advertised through the Society and College of Radiographers website pages.

Importantly, despite the challenges of the last year, the profession is in a stronger position as a profession with a greater number of radiographers working towards and gaining masters and doctoral level qualifications. There are more radiographers working in clinical academic roles and there has been further development of radiographers coordinating and delivering research as well as becoming research leaders. The updated research strategy supports the radiography profession in delivering research-based practice over the next five years offering a framework within which radiographers can develop.

Patient and public partnerships

In order and to ensure that all patients receive the provision of the best quality services possible, a patient centred model for care has been established by taking, recognising and understanding patient experiences providing real and unique insight into the provision of high-quality services for patients. Similarly, the desire to produce meaningful research in this field and to enhance the patient outcome has ensured the engagement of patient input into all research. As part of the continuing improvement of this model and the desire to ensure that all research in this field improves and enhances patient experience and outcomes, relevant patient input to all research is seen as a key requirement¹³.

Since the publication of the fourth research strategy the CoR commissioned work on patient and public partnerships. The result was the publication of the Guiding Principles for Patient,

Public and Practitioner Partnerships (4Ps) ¹⁴, which places research as a key aspect of service user involvement. It is recommended that the 4Ps document is read in conjunction with the updated research strategy. It contains core values as described by patients or carers, illustrated by patient stories, and supported by guidance as to how each core value can be achieved. It concludes with facilitative resources. Patients' stories and perspectives are a powerful source of information and are essential reading for all medical imaging and radiotherapy professionals whether in research or clinical practice. This document will continue to reflect the views of patient who, whether undergoing diagnostic imaging or radiotherapy deserve high-quality evidence-based care.

Beyond the Centenary of the SoR

As we move beyond the centenary year of the SoR it is a time to reflect and understand how we as a profession have evolved. In part this includes the development of an evidence base which is rapidly increasing in quality. Research teams today are often multiprofessional in nature and are able to disseminate their results widely with the use of social media and publishing software platforms. Members of the SoR have the opportunity to seek participants for their research via the SoR's online log of live members research projects and there is a growing number of doctoral candidates and also postdoctoral level radiographers who share their work via an online log¹⁵. The success of a Formal Research Radiography Mentoring Project (FoRRM) has been repeated in a second round of mentoring with mentees sharing their positive experiences^{16,17}. There are further methods for members to communicate and support each other with the use of an online research workspace for SoR members. In terms of collaborative work, SCoR continue to support and sit on the Council of Allied Health Professions Research (CAHPR).

In 2020 the College of Radiographers arranged an additional round to the College of Radiographers Industry Partnership Scheme (CoRIPS) awards in October that year, calling for research specific to Covid-19 to investigate implications for the profession and patients.

Changes to the presentation of the strategy

The research strategy is designed to inform, direct and support radiographers in their research activities acknowledging the barriers and enablers to research. The new edition of the research strategy will be presented in a more accessible format, with downloadable infographics. The working group recommended this in order to enable specific information to be more easily accessible for different groups including SoR members, patients, the public and professionals. We hope that you find this new format useful. This will be the start of a new way of showcasing the strategy, and updates will be regularly provided to reflect developments that occur over the coming years, so that it becomes much more of a 'living strategy'.

Discussion

The development of this, the fifth research strategy involved building on the Delphi study used in 2016 and ensuring that this strategy reflected both current and future issues within the profession.

The research strategy has three key aims:

Aim 1: Embed and enable research at all levels of radiography practice and education;

Aim 2: Raise the impact and profile of radiography through high quality research focussed on improving patient care and service delivery;

Aim 3: Expand UK radiography research capacity through development of skilled and motivated research active members of the profession.

The aims remain relevant and therefore unchanged from the previous strategy.

In the previous research strategy (2016-2021)¹¹ there were ten expectations listed. It is acknowledged that many of these expectations have not yet been fully achieved, but that there has been some considerable progress in these areas. The table below (Table 1) outlines the expectations outlined in the previous strategy and the progress made.

At the time of their development in 2016, the expectations were considered ambitious and progressive. They comprised expectations in research design and delivery, strategic planning, education and training, and research dissemination. The goals are evidenced by a number of means, some of which are easier to quantify than others at this time e.g. guidance development and bibliometrics. There are other expectations that will only become apparent when investigated longitudinally such as the number of clinical academic posts advertised, those seeking accreditation with a full master's degree and those departments registering a formal research strategy with their organisation. The SoR research group continue to seek empirical evidence of progress.

With this in mind, the decision was made that these should continue to be our aspirations for the next five years in order to maintain the momentum (Table 2).

Reporting on progress with these ten aspirations will occur at the SoR Research Advisory Group where the *Research Strategy Aspirations* will be a standing agenda item for discussion. There will also be an annual report to the CoR Board of Trustees. It is important that the aspirations are regularly reviewed, and progress recorded so that any changes can be reflected in the strategy and that the strategy remains current.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the fifth edition of the CoR Research Strategy encompasses the current position and future aspirations of the profession with regards to research. The research strategy will inform, direct and support radiographers in their research activities acknowledging the barriers and enablers to research.

The new strategy aims to be 'future proof' and more easily accessible to radiographers making research itself more easily accessible and encouraging all members to become involved.

We want to be aspirational and forward looking in order to continue to move the profession onwards.

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