



Level 2 Research Award - Report

A guide to starting out in clinical academic research

By Lisa Roberts
Clinical Professor of Musculoskeletal Health & Consultant Physiotherapist.
@LPhysioprof

*I would like to **thank the MACP for a Level 2 Research Award** to share our toolkit - a 'Guide to starting out in clinical academic research', which was presented at the World Physiotherapy Congress in Dubai, 2023 (Professional issues stream) and included as part of a keynote address at the Physiotherapy Research Society meeting on 12.04.2024.*

Project rationale

With a grant from UK Research and Innovation, a team at the School of Health Sciences at the University of Southampton worked with colleagues in Wessex Applied Research Collaboration and the University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust, to produce a toolkit of short films to help clinicians further engage in research and learn more about clinical academic pathways.

We often hear from clinical colleagues that it can be difficult navigating funding bodies, endless acronyms, and complex systems. Knowing where to start was the inspiration behind these films.

Background

Clinicians can find it challenging to move from being 'research aware' to 'research engaged' and emerging research leaders, particularly if they work as part of a small team, or an organisation that is new to supporting research. With the current emphasis on developing strong evaluative skills and delivering the research pillar in practice, free, equitable resources are needed to support clinicians to develop their research plans and/or consider a clinical academic career.

Whilst there is a plethora of information available to support applicants, it can be difficult to find, and may involve remote or in-person workshops at pre-set times. The content of these events is designed to help prospective applicants understand the process, explore what a good application includes, learn from peers who have met with success or failure, and hear insights from members of selection panels. These events, while well-received, are resource-intensive to deliver and can be difficult for clinicians to attend amid service demands.

Furthermore, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals are under-represented in securing funded fellowships (from the National Institute for Health Research and other funders), to pursue post-graduate research training, and thus, resources to support those seeking competitive funding are needed.

The aim of this project was to design, develop and evaluate a free, accessible toolkit for use across the clinical academic interface, offering advice and tips for clinicians on engaging in research and/or becoming a clinical academic.

The toolkit

The final resource comprised 10 short films (total 70 minutes) of animations and 'talking heads' from a range of allied health professionals and patient partners, who openly share their stories and experience of the process, from the

inception of their idea, forming a team, working with service-users and patient partners, through to writing a high-quality grant application and securing funding.

The content includes: 1) What is a clinical academic career?; 2) Forming your team; 3) Finding a mentor; 4) What makes a good application?; 5) Developing your training plans; 6) Public and patient involvement; 7) The funding interview; 8) Intellectual property and enterprise; 9) Personal stories; and 10) Sources of help.

The toolkit is primarily aimed at the early steps of the pathway (pre-doctoral and doctoral fellowship schemes), and the films can be accessed here: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9710034>

Evaluation

As part of the project, the films were evaluated with 30 clinical academics ranging from pre-doctoral to senior academic level. They had the opportunity to provide comments on each film, and these were used to revise the final versions. On a scale where 1=very poor; 2=poor; 3=fair; 4=good; and 5=very good, the mean content was rated as 4.6/5, the delivery 4.3, and the overall package scored 4.6.

The scores for the individual films were:

Film	Title	Mean score
1	What is a clinical academic career?	4.3
2	Forming your team	4.1
3	Finding a mentor	4.0
4	What makes a good application?	4.2
5	Developing your training plans	4.3
6	Public and patient involvement	4.4
7	The funding interview	4.7
8	Intellectual property and enterprise	4.2
9	Personal stories	4.6
10	Sources of help	4.4

Conclusion

When producing resources, it is essential to work with the target audience and patient partners to ensure the relevance and content of the material. Clinicians require support across a wide range of topics to develop competitive research applications, and it is important to share resources, to minimise duplication of effort and waste.

Implications

To strengthen the evidence base of the profession, physiotherapists need to move from being 'research aware' to being 'research engaged' or emerging future research leaders. This transition is complex, especially with current clinical pressures, and the existing support is variable, inequitable and insufficient. Designing and producing bespoke resources that address questions and issues raised by clinicians making this transition, will help provide advice and boost confidence, to support clinicians to develop robust plans that increase the likelihood of being successful when competing for grant and fellowship funding.

Dissemination

The toolkit was presented as a poster at the World Physiotherapy Congress (Dubai, 2023) and in a keynote address at the Physiotherapy Research Society on 12.04.2024, acknowledging the generous support of the MACP:

'A guide to starting out in clinical academic research'

Film	Title
1	What is a clinical academic career?
2	Forming your team
3	Finding a mentor
4	What makes a good application?
5	Developing your training plans
6	Public and patient involvement
7	The funding interview
8	Intellectual property and enterprise
9	Personal stories
10	Sources of help

Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9710034>

With thanks to the MACP for a research award to present this resource at WP2023

 Musculoskeletal Association of Chartered Physiotherapists

I also plan to share the toolkit and acknowledge the support of the MACP in my presentation at the forthcoming MACP / APPN Nurturing Research Conference on 21.06.2024.

Lisa Roberts
 Clinical Professor of Musculoskeletal Health & Consultant Physiotherapist.
 @LPhysioprof

The team

Lisa Roberts^{1,2}, Jamie Stevenson³, Catherine Bowen^{1,3}, Kay Mitchell^{1,2}, with central support from Jennifer McHugh⁴

¹University of Southampton, School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

² University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust, Therapy Services Department

³ National Institute for Health Research Applied Research Collaboration, Wessex

⁴University of Southampton, Research and Innovation Services