

It's time to get to grips with guts



Tips to set up a successful trainee network

Guts UK, in collaboration with other organisations such as the British Society of Gastroenterology and Dr Falk Pharma, supports research and audit/QI projects carried out by gastroenterology trainees. This document provides tips and advice on how to set up a trainee network.



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Aim

The aim of trainee-led networks is to deliver high quality multicentre audits and research projects using a network of trainees rotating between hospitals in the region. Such a network gives trainees an opportunity to get involved in collaborative research and audit and remain engaged as they move from one hospital to another. Collaborations between trainees in multiple centres help to deliver powerful studies that can have a positive impact on patient's care. Such networks allow the undertaking of large-scale research projects or audits aiming to answer clinically relevant questions. Larger projects help produce results that could significantly influence patient's care and might be more successful at obtaining grant funding from regional or national organisations.

Trainee-led networks also provide the infrastructure for trainees to increase the quality and impact of their audits, turning small local audits into regional and even national projects. Also help trainees to develop team working and leadership skills.

Group

First of all, get a motivated and enthusiastic group of trainees that work well together across the whole Deanery. This is the key to success. It would be helpful to have a few core members to drive the group forward (committee). Establish your name, logo, committee, network of trainees, constitution and technological support. Get inspiration and advice from other successful trainee networks i.e. the [West Midlands Research in Gastroenterology Group](#), the [Gastroenterology Audit and Research Network \(GARNet\)](#), and the [West Midlands Research Collaborative](#) (a surgical trainee-led research network).

Mentor

It is very important to have a consultant that is enthusiastic about the group and supportive. It is helpful if they have research experience themselves. They should advise and guide you with regards to projects selection and improvements but at the same time allow you to develop your own ideas. You might want to consider having your mentor(s) at your trainee-network meetings to provide you with feedback.

Meetings

It is important to plan regular meetings. These should ideally be face to face and could take place after the training days, as it will help to gather most of the trainees at the same time. However evening meetings after work have been popular as well. How frequently should you meet? In our experience, at

least every couple of months; however, monthly meetings might be more helpful. You should aim to have a pre-set agenda to guide the meeting. Regular communication is key to developing and delivering a successful project. It could be done via face to face meetings but also by using Skype, WhatsApp or phone, especially for the project steering committee whilst they are working on the development of the project. It is also useful to have formal annual meetings.

Project

Try to pick an easy project to start with, perhaps an audit, retrospective or prospective. This will allow you to get a group together, boost enthusiasm amongst the trainees and most likely you will be able to complete the project. Ideally the problem investigated should be common enough to allow a decent number of cases to be collected in a short time from every centre in the region. Follow-up periods should not be longer than a few months. Data collection proforma for each case should not be too complex or long.

Project selection should be done by vote, ideally at one of the trainee meetings. Trainees can submit a project proposal to the committee, which will then be considered by both the committee and by all trainees, supported by a mentor. The alternative selection process involves the presentation and selection of a project proposal at one of the annual conferences, where trainees vote on the best project ideas presented. Each project should have a steering committee, a regional lead, local representatives at each site acting as the project's lead, and a local Trust Mentor/Consultant overseeing the project. The regional project is responsible for collating and analysing the data, writing a project summary, and submitting the data as an abstract for a meeting or a paper. The local Mentor's role is to supervise the project in each hospital. It is not essential to have a local Mentor but they can help make the process of conducting audit/research much easier. Some of the local project Mentors were trainees who were involved in our trainee network from the beginning and are now Consultants.

Funding

How can you fund your research? You can apply for money for your network development via local gastroenterology groups. You can use those funds, for example, to develop and maintain your website, organise the meetings, and to cover travel costs to other regions/meetings to promote your research network. Check with your Deanery if there are any grants available that will help you to develop your infrastructure. You can ask pharmaceutical companies to help with your research meetings. With regards to research funding, there are an increasing number of awards inviting trainee-led networks to apply. Guts UK (formerly Core), the only charity in the UK committed to fighting all digestive disorders, funds awards for trainee networks in collaboration with the British Society of Gastroenterology and Dr Falk Pharma, the latter specifically for audit and quality improvement projects. Visit Guts UK's website at www.gutscharity.org.uk for more details.

Members

All specialty trainees in gastroenterology are considered to be Members within the trainee-led research network unless they choose otherwise. Encourage people to join, including your junior colleagues foundation doctors 1 and 2, core medical or surgical trainees and medical students. Medical students can successfully contribute to project's data collection under supervision, gaining experience in audit, research ethics and methodology at the same time.

Committee and a constitution

The Committee should consist of a chairman, a vice-chairman, a treasurer, a secretary and an IT lead, and should include trainees from a number of regional hospitals. Writing a constitution can be a good starting point of the trainee collaborative. The sections of the constitution to consider are:

- Collaborative aims and structure
- Committee and membership rules
- Committee roles

- Project management regulations
- Project roles
- Authorship rules
- Committee meeting regulations

All individuals who contributed to the project should be acknowledged as authors. All presentations or publications should be under a corporate name of your network, with all the contributors listed i.e alphabetically by surname in bibliographic databases such as PubMed.

Communication and social media

Ensure that network's members are kept up to date with network developments; communication needs to be open and transparent through regular emails and meetings. It is extremely important to get yourself visible on social media. Twitter or Facebook are important channels of communication and sources of information. They help to keep up to date with research developments and act as reminders about the meetings. To manage our regional projects we use emails, phone conferences, WhatsApp and group meetings.

Networking and collaborations

Building networks with colleagues is essential. Attending research meeting where research ideas are shared will help to develop new collaborations between regions and inspire you with new ideas for research projects. You might get noticed by successful researchers who will invite you to collaborate with them. It is also essential for research trainee network members to build up engagement with the NIHR Clinical Research Network by attending local meetings. Rising awareness of clinical research projects amongst peers help trainees to get involved into portfolio studies and create strong foundations for future collaborations within the specialty.