

## **General tips for getting started with an OOPR research project**

### **Start early**

The pace in research is much slower than the minute-to-minute, task-oriented existence that prevails in clinical medicine. The lead time for arranging research projects is usually long, especially where you will be involved in launching the project, such as with writing funding applications, study protocols and ethics submissions.

In some cases senior investigator colleagues will have arranged a project ready to go, which then has a clinical fellow role that will need filling. This puts less onus on you to get the funding and project off the ground, but recruitment for these roles is still often as far as a year in advance of the start date.

It is easy to put off exploring research opportunities with all the attendant pressures of clinical practice and exams, but if you can invest a small amount of time early on it will help you stand a better chance of getting what you want.

### **Be clear about your goals**

Are you looking to develop research skills to improve your practice? Get some publications? Earn a higher degree? Learn a new technology? Develop an academic career?

Different projects will offer different outputs. If you are able, it's helpful to spend some time considering what's most important for you. Think about how your research/OOPE will fit into a longer term career plan. Or, if you want flexibility with regards the route you take, how your project will provide that. Learning a new technology might make you more attractive to future employers looking to roll out that technology in their centre. A clinical placement in a rare tumour site would make you more competitive for posts in that field as a consultant.

In general, publications are the key output from research projects. Consider what the publication strategy for your project will be and how likely this is to unfold as planned.

### **Knock on doors**

Take advantage of local contacts to find out who is working in your areas of interest. Talk to people at conferences. Meet potential supervisors and their teams. This can be wearing, as the people you're trying to meet are often extremely busy, but it is enormously worthwhile. Gradually you'll get a feel for what's available and how people see you as a candidate. People are often very generous with advice and it makes a good impression to be pro-active. Look up the outputs of previous clinical fellows in groups you're considering and discuss with them where possible.

Also talk to colleagues who have been through the process about their experiences and what they would do differently if they had the chance. Discuss your plans with any mentors you may have. Often it can be difficult to tell exactly what you can expect from a project, especially if you have little prior experience in the area, so it's useful to take about your options with a third party who is not involved with the process to get an outside view.

Some clinical fellowship posts are highly sought-after, and there is a competitive element. Bear in mind that meetings with potential supervisors are always part fact-finding and part interview.

The RCR has a College Academic Group which sends out fellowships inviting applications. Contact [research@rcr.ac.uk](mailto:research@rcr.ac.uk) to be added to the list.

### **Have a plan for funding**

It is critical to have a solid plan for funding. If your plan is to take dedicated time out then funding needs to part of the conversation from the very start of getting involved in a research project. You might have the most fantastic idea/project/supervisor, but if there is no funding in place nothing is going to happen. If there is already funding in place for you this is not a concern, but if funding is yet to be secured bear in mind that the failure rate for funding applications is high. Given the time involved in putting together grant applications it may be some time before another application can be submitted. Have a plan B if possible.

### **Choose your supervisor carefully**

Your supervisor is the most important other person for the success of your project. You don't have to be best friends, but you do need a constructive working relationship. For most clinicians, the 2-3 years of an OOPE in research will be the longest they have worked for any single boss, so it's a new experience. In an ideal world your supervisor would be on hand to help you whenever you required, patiently train you but give you enough space to develop autonomy. In the real world compromise is required. If you can, talk to other fellows who have worked with the supervisor and what were best and worst bits of their experience.

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