

Research at the coalface: using an innovative approach to facilitate clinically relevant MS research



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Background :

TiMS (Therapists in MS) is a national network of allied health professionals whose aim is to improve MS services. The facilitation of research is viewed as integral to this.

Clinicians have a wealth of knowledge about clinically important questions and are often keen to be involved in research, but frequently lack the confidence and skills to design and implement research studies.

Aims:

- To undertake clinically relevant MS research.
- To facilitate a project to develop the research skills and knowledge of clinicians working with people with MS.

Process:

- A national call for research questions via TiMS produced 15 questions; one was selected for investigation.
- A literature review ensured the research question was answerable
- The research question was defined; “Investigating the effectiveness of core stability training on mobility and balance in ambulant individuals with MS”.
- Study design was determined as a multi-centre replicated single case study design
- TiMS advertised for clinicians to participate in the research as “Novice Researchers”.
- Twenty respondents submitted a CV & were vetted using standardised criteria; 5 physiotherapists from 5 different UK centres were chosen.
- Working collaboratively, the TiMS Project Team & Novice Researchers defined the intervention & refined the study design. Ethical approval was undertaken by an experienced researcher within the Project Team.
- Formal Training (2 study days) & ongoing informal support was provided to the Novice Researchers throughout.
- Feedback by the Novice Researchers, about the research process was gathered via an anonymous online questionnaire.
- Publication of the results: Freeman et al (2010) The effect of core stability training on balance and mobility in ambulant individuals with MS: a multi-centre series of single case studies *Multiple Sclerosis* 2010 August 10 [Epub ahead of print]

Conclusions:

- This approach provides:
- A successful mechanism for undertaking clinically relevant research
 - A useful forum for enhancing clinicians research knowledge and skills (as indicated by the online questionnaire)
 - A template for increasing collaboration between clinicians & researchers; enhancing the clinical relevance of research
 - A means of undertaking preliminary work upon which to base future research studies
 - The process is pertinent for use in other clinical areas and may be suitable to facilitate multidisciplinary involvement.
 - The process requires time and commitment.

Results:

Margaret Gear, Shetland: submitted research question and coordinated later phases of project

“I didn’t have the knowledge or skills to research the topic on my own, but the TiMS group worked together to make it happen. We’ve been fortunate to have a huge level of support from an experienced researcher.”

Paula Cowan, Lothian: site researcher

“Doing this project helped me to see that implementing research into everyday practice is beneficial for clinical governance.....it also showed that team working was essential. To do this alone would be a very hard task.”

Clare Mobberley, Birmingham: site researcher

“My knowledge of the research process has improved greatly and this has helped me to evaluate other studies. It has given me an interest in research and I will be looking to get involved in other studies”

Annette Pauli, Cardiff: coordinated initial phases of project

“As everyone had volunteered for this project there was a great deal of enthusiasm throughout the process. It also benefited from being made up of individuals with different skills and expertise. Taking part in has been a positive experience.”

Jenny Freeman, Plymouth: study design and ethics

“Carrying out single case studies from 5 different trusts meant that gaining the multi-centre ethics approval required considerable time, organisation and patience! It’s important that this is factored into the study timeline. The associated hassle was, however, well rewarded by the excellent mix of staff, patients and clinical environments it brought to the project”.

Caireen Finnigan, Fife: site researcher

“Having the support of other clinicians and researchers gave me the confidence to take part in a research project. It was great being able to put theory into practice and be involved in research in my own clinical setting.”

Helen Hunter, Northumberland: site researcher

“This was a fantastic way of dipping a toe into research in a supported environment and has proved it is possible to conduct research in a remote and rural clinical setting.”

Rosie Sims, South Tees: site researcher

“It was good to be involved in deciding the outcome measures and design of the study and I did feel we were allowed to contribute and not just informed of what was going to happen.”

Nicola Russell – MS Trust - Letchworth, Hertfordshire

“Core stability is a critical issue for people with MS, and loss of core stability can significantly limit activities and reduce quality of life. The MS Trust has been very pleased to support the Therapists in MS group to undertake this innovative research project.”

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