

THE INAUGURAL PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH CHAMPIONSHIP AS A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT TO PROMOTE RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Primary care research is currently at the cross-roads in the ASEAN region. Research activities are springing up within primary care or Family Medicine academic institutions in Asian countries. Some are advanced like that in Australia and Malaysia, as evidenced by their respective bibliographies of primary care research (Khoo et al, 2008)¹. Others are gaining momentum in their research efforts.

Engaging practicing family physicians to participate in research remains a challenge due to competing interests for the busy doctors, especially for the private general practitioners. Nonetheless, more family physicians are receiving further training in the field of family medicine with resultant greater exposure to evidence-based medicine and research; more of them recognise the merits of research to value-add to their quality of care delivery to their patients. Research ideas begin to sprout amongst family physicians within both public and private primary care practices. It is vital that such ideas do not die prematurely due to paucity of stimulation. A crucible is urgently needed to transform these ideas into scientifically sound research studies.

The promotion of primary care research initiated by WONCA at the Kingston invitational Conference in 2003 has been a good rallying point. (Rosser & van Weel, 2004)². The vision that research in Family/General Practice is essential for improving health globally is a powerful *raison d'être* (Rosser & van Weel, 2004)³. Armed with this vision, the Kingston conference issued seven recommendations which together from a road map for organisational, national, and regional efforts at developing family medicine research infrastructure and processes.

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These recommendations can be grouped into 3 categories: (1) building dissemination mechanisms and a clearinghouse, (2) building research infrastructure and processes, and (3) building social capital. (Stange, 2004)⁴ In pursuance of the second and third categories of recommendations, the authors of this editorial mooted the idea of the research championship which will be one of the highlights of the second Asia-Pacific Primary Care Research Conference (APPCRC) to be held in Singapore on 4th and 5th December 2010.

The Aims and the Ends in Mind

The aim is to use this championship as the crucible for family physicians to put forward their research questions and ideas and to learn to use appropriate research methods to answer them, being guided by experienced family medicine researchers in the academia. It is akin to putting research ingredients into a wok with the aim of preparing a palatable and nutritious dish to nourish the discipline under the close supervision of experienced chefs.

With specialist researchers and bench scientists competing for the same pie of research funding, family physicians encounter an uphill battle. The championship is thus staged in a competitive environment to better prepare the family physicians to polish up their research questions, research methodology, research proposals, and presentations. These efforts have the end in mind of improving their chances of successful bids for the limited research funding pie.

In this research conference, the aims of this research championship are:

- To provide a platform for the family physicians to showcase their research ideas and to create a favourable environment to nurture them into matured research projects and studies under the guidance of experienced primary care researchers.
- To create opportunities for family physicians to work together on research projects of mutual interests with the ultimate objective of improving the health and lives of their patients and to enhance their family practice.
- To develop their presentation skills and polish up their grantsmanship in a simulated competitive climate, so as to gain recognition from their national or academic research funding agency and improve their success rate in obtaining research grants.

This championship targets any practising family physicians or medical students from established medical colleges or faculties of universities in the region, with special interest in developing the Family Medicine discipline.

To prepare the ground work of the championship, family physicians who are experienced researchers, especially those with track record of lead authorship in medical research publications, take on the role of mentors to the targeted participants. These mentors are encouraged to provide input to participants during the championship.

Teamwork is the way for primary care research. Solo efforts will drain any novice researcher. Participants are encouraged to form teams of three to eight members within their institutions. They may also collaborate with family physicians or medical students of other medical institutions in their respective country or other Asia-Pacific countries.

Areas of Research in Family Medicine

Primary care research is broad-based, from clinical to health service to pedagogy research in family medicine training and education. The authors have selected Prof Larry Green's domains Family Medicine research (Green, 2004)⁵ as a model for the championship. Participants should relate their research question and idea to any of the four domains or domain interface:

1. Disease
2. Patient/Healthy individual
3. Physician/family physician
4. Healthcare system

Examples of domains of research include management of upper respiratory tract disease (acute disease) or hypertension (chronic disease), health-seeking behaviour (patient/public), drug prescribing behaviour (physician), accessibility to emergency care in primary care clinics (healthcare system), doctor-patient interaction or patient's self-management in asthma (disease-patient domain interface).

Judging at the Championship

To create excitement and to stimulate audience' participation, the research proposal presentation will be judged live based on a two-tiered system. A panel of plenary speakers at the conference will be appointed to judge and provide critique during the live presentation. What sets this championship apart from the conventional poster or oral presentation in medical conferences is the participation of the conference audience in judging the entries. The audience will serve as jurors to appraise the teams in terms of the clarity of the research question and how the research proposal appeals and impacts on them with regards to the importance or relevance to family practices. After all, it is important for all participants to judge for themselves the merit and values of the research and its translation to better primary care in the future. As such, the audience's input will contribute towards the team total scores in the final round of the championship. This is enabled by the use of the "classroom performance system" clickers, which allow remote input from the live audiences and immediate tally of the scores.

Prizes will be awarded to the team with the highest score in recognition of the team's efforts. The championship trophy will be presented to the winning team at the next WONCA Asia Pacific regional conference, who will be invited to report on the progress of their research project after the championship. This ensures that this research championship delivers what it is set up to achieve and continues to be a major catalyst for further primary care research development.

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