



LETTERS

SCANDAL OF RESEARCH WASTE

Collaborative student research efforts provide a solution to research wastage

Waheed-Ul-Rahman Ahmed *fourth year medical student*¹, Emily Mills *fourth year medical student*², Rachel A Khaw *final year medical student*³, Kenneth A McLean *academic foundation doctor*⁴, James C Glasbey *academic clinical fellow*⁵

¹University of Exeter, College of Medicine and Health, Exeter, UK; ²Brighton and Sussex Medical School, Brighton, UK; ³University of Manchester Medical School, Manchester, UK; ⁴University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; ⁵University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

Sharp and Curlewis¹ provide a student's perspective on research waste² and discuss recognised pressures in UK medical schools to publish research "at all costs." Research collaborations, such as STARSurg (Student Audit and Research in Surgery), enable students to engage in high quality studies with great impact, while gaining fundamental skills in study design and delivery. All contributors are recognised equally as collaborators, citable on PubMed, under single corporate authorship (STARSurg Collaborative). This flattens and democratises the hierarchies inherent to traditional authorship. We agree that the UK Foundation Programme's application service could be seen to encourage quantity rather than quality of publications. It rewards all PubMed citable authorship (including that of letters and case reports) with crucial additional points yet fails to recognise students' major contributions to collaborative studies.³

Medical students have been essential in designing and delivering five STARSurg audits to date, including over 20 000 patients across 25 countries. Protocols undergo extensive peer review before publication and scrutiny from audit and ethical approval processes internationally. Collaborative research represents a viable solution to avoid research waste.

Despite multiple attempts at discourse and an open letter to the UK Foundation Programme on behalf of over 900 signatories,⁴ we are saddened that the stance not to recognise collaborators remains. We strongly urge the programme to update its position to appropriately credit collaborative research in its application service, as is now done at specialist training and consultant levels. This would have a crucial role in reducing research waste due to the inflated value of low level publications and would ultimately promote a culture of engagement with high quality research, increasing the likelihood of patient benefit.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k4645/rr-1>.

- 1 Sharp E, Curlewis K. Research waste is still a scandal—especially in medical students. *BMJ* 2019;364:l700.
- 2 Glasziou P, Chalmers I. Research waste is still a scandal—an essay by Paul Glasziou and Iain Chalmers. *BMJ* 2018;363:k4645. 10.1136/bmj.k4645 30420358
- 3 UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO). UK Foundation Programme 2019 Applicants' Handbook. <http://www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk>.
- 4 STARSurg Collaborative. Students' participation in collaborative research should be recognised. *Int J Surg* 2017;39:234-7. 10.1016/j.ijsu.2017.01.114 28167380

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