Collaborative research in ophthalmology: the way forward?

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Collaborative research groups have become well established in the UK over the past 10 years. They offer a practical solution to conducting research by facilitating the recruitment of a large number of patients over a short period of time, thus allowing for greater generalisability of conclusions.¹ These research groups tend to be led by highly motivated trainees who are ideally placed to deliver this model; they follow a postgraduate training system that takes them through several hospitals and puts great emphasis on acquiring and honing key research skills.

The true impact of these collaborative research groups was demonstrated by Jamjoon *et al.*² This unique study sought to objectively analyse the research output made by these groups; their results were positive and highlighted the true impact that trainee-led research has had with regard to the literature and clinical practice.² Following this success, there has been a push to set up these networks across all specialties.^{2,3}

It seems, then, that several surgical specialties have benefited from these networks. To assess whether ophthalmological research could also benefit from such systems, the London Ophthalmology trainee Clinical Trials Network (OCTN) was born. It was hoped that this would encourage ophthalmology trainees to move away from conducting small single-centred studies, with limited impact, to larger well-designed studies that change clinical practice and are supported by a network of collaborators between trainees and ophthalmology units.

Recently, the OCTN has published its first study that sought to determine variations in periprocedural practice in the treatment of neovascular age-related macular degeneration.⁴ This multi-centred observational study recruited data from 26 units in the UK, and in turn demonstrated the viability and utility of a trainee research network. Trainees not only

assisted with data collection, but also contributed valuable insight into the study design, analysis, and interpretation. Therefore, these networks seem to cultivate a culture of critique and appraisal promoting collaborator involvement at multiple stages of the study pyramid.

Collaborative research groups have reformed the way that research is carried out and offer a novel effective model for health-care research. Results from the first OCTN study show that they are a feasible option that should be embraced by the ophthalmology community. Clarity and transparency in the collaboratorship process are essential in nurturing these networks and carrying them forward in future practice.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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