



The establishment of a practice-based research network to enhance the implementation of healthcare policy



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BACKGROUND

General practitioners (GPs) are situated at the front line of healthcare, where over 80% of all healthcare consultations take place, however practice involvement in research remains fragmented¹. Historically, general practice research has been under-resourced and marginalized, but experts have agreed that the profession must progress as an academic discipline in order to have evidence to inform decision making on issues that concern general practice².

By investing substantial time and resources to develop long-term relationships with clinicians, their practices, and their communities PBRNs can improve quality of care and improve community health³. Development of a PBRN also provides a platform for conducting high-quality research, and by coming together to learn from each other and share resources value is added to both research opportunities and practice quality⁴.

In partnership with the Ireland East Hospital Group, UCD School of Medicine has established a PBRN to carry out a programme of research to enhance integration between primary and secondary care, which we aim to describe in this paper.

METHODS

The establishment of the UCD / Ireland East PBRN involved three sequential stages:

Stage 1 involved a cross-sectional survey of general practitioners (GPs) in the Ireland East region to identify priority areas for research. A 34-item online questionnaire was sent to 430 GPs in the Ireland East region examining priority areas of research and enhancing integration at the GP–Hospital interface.

Stage 2 involved the recruitment of practices to be involved in the UCD / Ireland East PBRN. Sixty-five practices were invited to submit an expression of interest to participate in four demonstration projects.

Stage 3 will involve practices participating in four demonstration projects informed by the findings from the survey conducted in Stage 1.

RESULTS

One hundred and sixteen GPs participated in the cross-sectional survey. Twenty-two practices indicated an interest in being involved in the PRBN, with 10-14 practices currently participating in four initial demonstration projects.

GPs identified four priority research areas

- Enhancing integrated care at the GP-hospital interface
- COVID-19's impact on primary care and related mitigation strategies
- Cardiovascular disease care in general practice
- Direct access to diagnostic imaging in general practice

Interventions to enhance integration between primary and secondary care

Enhanced communication	56.6% (n=60)
Access to OPD/clinics	16% (n = 17)
Enhanced access to diagnostics	8.5% (n= 9)
Increased resources to primary care	7.5% (n=8)
Enhanced MDT input	3.8% (n= 4)
Misc. others	8.5% (n= 9)

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of the UCD / Ireland East PBRN allows an effective vehicle for community-based research with a strong focus on developing and evaluating new approaches to integrated care to consistently and sustainably impact on policy and patient care.

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References:

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