
Academy of Medical Sciences Calls for More Research Time



A [new report](#) suggests the UK's National Health Service (NHS) should run a pilot project allowing more protected research time for NHS staff.

Estimate of the economic costs and literature review of the benefits of dedicated research time for Hospital Consultants in the NHS was commissioned by the Academy of Medical Sciences within its wider project, '[Enhancing the NHS-academia interface](#).'

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The authors identified that it is impossible for most Consultants (except Consultant Clinical Academics) to find time for carrying out research on top of their direct clinical care duties. Therefore, giving one in five of Consultants one day a week for research means backfilling of an equivalent amount of time for direct clinical care.

In a Teaching Hospital Trust (415 Consultants on average) the backfilling would cost €3.5 million (£3.01 million), and in a District General Hospital Trust (182 Consultants on average) €1.53 million (£1.32 million) per year. Thus, the proposed pilot would cost €25.23 million (£21.7 million): €17.56 million (£15.1 million) for five Teaching Hospital Trusts and €7.67 million (£6.6 million) for five District General Hospital Trusts. If the backfilling is done not by Consultants on rotation, but by locum Consultants, the overall cost would rise to €29.01 million (£25 million) per year.

It is noted that this cost could be offset by benefits. There were no evidence in the study that this can be quantified in any meaningful way. The literature review, however, showed that providing staff with dedicated research time was related to successful research programmes as well as increasing level of job satisfaction and employee retention among others.

For the NHS, the potential benefits of allowing the staff time for research are important in the context of [high vacancy rates](#) among medical staff and the cost of [using agency staff](#).

In conclusion, the authors of the report recommend that a pilot study examine the actual cost of providing dedicated research time to clinicians. They also underscore that a number of the benefit metrics should be assessed, including job satisfaction; improvement in clinical outcomes; the success of research programmes, etc.

In his comment to [Laboratory News](#) Professor Sir Robert Lechler, President of the Academy of Medical Sciences, stressed the importance of research for patients, the NHS, Universities and economy in general. "Research is the tonic the NHS needs right now," he said. "There is increasing evidence that shows that patients treated in research active hospitals get better quality of care, even if they are not taking part in a research project."

Source: [Academy of Medical Sciences](#)

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