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Engaging medical students in the continuum of research: key requirements for a 'total research experience'

Kathryn M. Weston

University of Wollongong, kathw@uow.edu.au

Judy Mullan

University of Wollongong, jmullan@uow.edu.au

Peter L. McLennan

University of Wollongong, petermcl@uow.edu.au

Warren C. Rich

University of Wollongong, wrich@uow.edu.au

Shelley P. Crowther

University of Wollongong, crowther@uow.edu.au

See next page for additional authors

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Abstract

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Authors

Kathryn M. Weston, Judy Mullan, Peter L. McLennan, Warren C. Rich, Shelley P. Crowther, and John A. Bushnell

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Engaging medical students in the continuum of research: key requirements for a 'total research experience'

Kathryn Weston, University of Wollongong, Graduate School of Medicine, Wollongong, Australia*

Judy Mullan, University of Wollongong, Graduate School of Medicine, Wollongong, Australia

Peter McLennan, University of Wollongong, Graduate School of Medicine, Wollongong, Australia

Warren Rich, University of Wollongong, Graduate School of Medicine, Wollongong, Australia

Shelley Crowther, University of Wollongong, Graduate School of Medicine, Wollongong, Australia

John Bushnell, University of Wollongong, Graduate School of Medicine, Wollongong, Australia

Background: Research training is acknowledged as an important feature of medical education. However, allocating time for an authentic research experience can be difficult within a busy and demanding curriculum. Identification of the key features important in the delivery of a research program can be helpful for others embarking on the same quest.

Summary of Work: During a 12-month community-based clerkship placement, all medical students design and undertake a research project from development of their own individual research question, through collecting and analysing data, to dissemination of findings. This paper describes key requirements for success identified during the first five years of implementation of an authentic research activity in a new medical school.

Summary of Results: Through a process of regular program review and response, the following were identified as key requirements for engaging students in the continuum of research: dedicated program management; individual academic supervision for students; a mechanism to avoid research ethics review bottlenecks; access to online research resources; and formal assessment to facilitate engagement. Access to research support after graduation supports continuity of engagement.

Discussion and Conclusions: An important enabler in engaging medical students in the research continuum is a 12-month longitudinal clerkship placement, which provides the extended time and setting for the research. Evidence of success of the research program includes improvements in the students' research capability, peer-reviewed student research publications and national/international conference presentations, and graduates interested in pursuing research as junior doctors.

Take-home messages: It is possible to provide medical students with a meaningful 'total research experience' through provision of a well-supported and adaptable program.