

Reasons to research

Elaine Desnoyers, MD Christopher Sikora, MD Miriam Lacasse, MD
from the Section of Residents Research Subcommittee

Research. The word sends shivers down the spines of many residents. Why do some of us dread it so much? Is there any way to change our feelings about research? With the help of the Section of Residents of the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), we have compiled a "Top 10" list of questions many residents ask. Through this list we hope to debunk some of the myths, offer some useful resources, and take away some of the dread.

10. Does anyone even care? People *do* care. Your research can be relevant and might well affect the way we practise medicine—especially if you are asking an important or interesting question. Remember, many of the physicians responsible for writing Canadian clinical practice guidelines are successful family physicians.

9. Do I even care? You don't necessarily have to do a project with your preceptor or accept a topic you are not interested in. There are plenty of physicians and research scientists looking for people like you. Find someone with an idea or a project that *you* find interesting. If you are required to do research with your preceptors, propose a subject. You will be surprised by how infectious inspiration can be.

8. Can I find enough subjects in a small family medicine clinic? The number of patients with a given problem might be low in a small clinic, but overall numbers are quite large, providing a good sample population. Also, networking with other family physicians provides a great opportunity to increase the number of subjects.

7. How is it possible to find enough time to do research with everything else I have to learn in 2 years? It is possible to start small or with something that you would be interested in continuing once you are finished residency. Create a specific question and stick to it. Don't forget: research work can be shared among friends.

6. Is there any support available? Actually, yes. There is faculty support at every university. We've compiled a list of helpful resources below.

5. Will there be funding for my research? Many projects are simple and do not require much funding. For those that will incur some cost, many residency departments have funding set aside. Ask your research supervisor what your program has available to offset costs.

4. Won't the process of ethics approval be painful?

Okay, there is no "easy" button for this. Ethics approval is not necessary for every project, but it will be required if you plan to do patient interventions. Start the process early if it's required for your project.

3. Statistics? What do you mean, statistics?

There are statisticians out there who really, really like to help with this stuff. If you can't find one, look into computer statistics programs to run the figures for you, or go to one of your faculty for help (see box).

2. Will I have to edit the paper?


Edit. Re-edit. Write the entire paper over. Edit again. By the end of the editing process, you might no longer recognize the paper as your own. If this occurs, however, rest assured that it is probably for the best. You have a team of experts guiding you to get your message out clearly and succinctly, which not only serves your work but also your readers. And for all the headaches, we have found that NSAIDs work quite nicely.

1. Aren't there things I would rather be doing?

When you find a topic that you like, you might even enjoy it. Research actually isn't as time consuming as you think. And think of how satisfied you'll be after completing a good day of research.

We promised there was help. The box at right lists 5 tools that can help you through and might even change the way you feel about research.

We have attempted to uncover and address several of the most common reasons why residents dread research. While there are residents out there who panic at the thought of starting, continuing, or completing their research projects, those of us who find research both interesting and rewarding hope that you find the tools provided in this article helpful and easy to use.

We wish you all good luck in your research endeavours. 

Dr Desnoyers is a second-year family medicine resident at the University of Calgary in Alberta. **Dr Sikora** is a community medicine resident at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and a former member of the Section of Residents of the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

Dr Lacasse is a second-year family medicine resident at Laval University in Quebec and a current representative from Quebec city at the Section of Residents.

Five tools to help with your research

1. **Rosser W. Do we really need family medicine research?** *Can Fam Physician* 2004;50:1189-91 (Eng), 1197-9 (Fr).
2. **Library services.** The CFPC has amazing library services. Details are available at www.cfpc.ca. Select "Library Services" from the main menu.
3. **National Research System.** This consists of a network of family physicians in Canada interested in answering research questions arising from their day-to-day practice. Go to www.cfpc.ca. Select "National Research System (NaReS)" from the "Research" drop-down menu.
4. **National Physician Survey.** A large-scale survey of medical students, residents, and physicians was done in 2004; the data are available to residents and physicians for analysis. Anyone interested can simply forward a question to Sarah Scott (National Physician Survey and Janus Project Coordinator, CFPC; telephone 905 629-0900, extension 289; e-mail sks@cfpc.ca). This is a great and relatively easy way to familiarize yourself with research, and the amount of information here is incredible. Go to www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca.
5. **Faculty support.** Here are some useful links. They can also be accessed from the Section of Researchers webpage on the "Research" drop-down menu at www.cfpc.ca.
 - University of British Columbia: www.familypractice.ubc.ca/indexb.html
 - University of Calgary: www.ucalgary.ca/familymedicine/pg_research.html
 - University of Alberta: www.familymed.med.ualberta.ca/ (Click on "Research Program")
 - University of Saskatchewan: www.usask.ca/medicine/family/research
 - University of Manitoba: www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/medicine/family_medicine/html/research.htm
 - University of Western Ontario: www.familymedicineuwo.ca/research/overview.shtml
 - McMaster University: www.fammedmcmaster.ca/research/
 - University of Toronto: <http://dfcm19.med.utoronto.ca/research/default.htm>
 - Queen's University: www.queensu.ca/fmed/cspcweb/
 - University of Ottawa: www.medicine.uottawa.ca/family/eng/researchers.html
 - Laval University: <http://w3.fmed.ulaval.ca/mfa/secteurs/recherche>
 - McGill University: www.medicine.mcgill.ca/familymed/research.htm
 - University of Montreal: www.medfam.umontreal.ca/contenu/recherche.htm
 - University of Sherbrooke: http://www.usherbrooke.ca/medecine_famille/recherche/princ_chercheurs.html
 - Dalhousie University: <http://family.medicine.dal.ca/Research/index.html>
 - Memorial University: www.med.mun.ca/familymed/pages/research/research_overview.htm