

RESEARCH – to do or not to do that is the question!

Minichello, Sullivan Greenwood and Axford¹ define research as "to search again or to examine carefully, more specifically research is a rigorous, systematic enquiry or investigation, and its purpose is to validate and/ or refine existing knowledge and to generate new knowledge." This process in reality develops the need to collect, organise and present information to enable analysis and interpretation and arrive at outcomes. Research outcomes may change the way in which patients are managed, services are modified or are not delivered.

As Orthoptists practice in a wide range of clinical settings these settings provide opportunities to collect data that will support the management of patients with vision defects, implement treatment regimes and review current developments in the fields of eye care. How can conventional practice become research? Apart from the gold standard, double blind randomised studies, consider the following research strategies:

1. Turning a quality assurance project into a publication. Many practitioners are required to review their work practise within specified guidelines and state outcomes. Other practitioners review their skills as part of an ongoing self - evaluation. Both approaches can be modified to provide a research presentation that can be of benefit to colleagues and the profession more widely.
2. Use an interesting case as a single case analysis to show change over time or variation from the considered "norm". An interesting clinical case can be used as an educational tool to refresh, update, re-evaluate ones own clinical practice or inform another profession. Take for example a "garden variety" amblyopia case where the treatment pattern seems set according to age or condition, a review of the literature may reveal recent changes in approach which, when implemented in a patient, produce significant and effective results. The same case may be used to educate General Practitioners.
3. Practice informing research which includes an overview of a professional skill area, particularly across several years, can be of value in many ways. For instance areas where practitioners interact with other disciplines and impart knowledge about the relevance of vision defects in patient survival. A review of professional experience across several years can demonstrate how practice has changed and

remind practitioners of the reasons for current approaches.

4. Participate in group research, pool your resources to have a larger data set, become part of a research team, have a research mentor to brain storm ideas, collaborate co-author a paper and collect data with another colleague or profession. "If research-based knowledge is to become the basis for client care, there must be direct involvement by health care professionals at all levels of preparation and experience"¹.
5. One way of addressing persistent concerns is to explore, probe or scrutinise the concern to enable the development and implementation of a solution. This process can be initiated through a systematic review of past and current literature using thematic analysis which forms the basis of a literature review.
6. Commenting on public health issues for instance cancelling Pre-school vision programmes. Issues such as this require the review of literature and research into health management and policy in order to develop a sound argument. Often the end result is a letter that summarises the salient issues. The wider literature base can be usefully turned into a publication that informs the profession.

The research process often appears to be daunting or for members of the profession who are inspired to research.

This journal edition demonstrates several research models that clearly reveal how solid efforts of enquiry enable professions to move ahead, and deliver evidence based clinical practice.

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Reference:

1. Minichello, Sullivan Greenwood and Axford 2004 *Research Methods for Nursing and Health Sciences* Prentice Hall