Career Pathways in Research: Support / Management Pathway

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Career Pathways in Research: Support / Management Pathway

This article on the Support / Management pathway highlights careers that are open to nurses in NHS R&D Programmes, Trusts, funding bodies and charitable organisations. Developing your career in research support or management can help make a difference by ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place to support research, and that the right decisions are made about which pieces of research should be supported and commissioned.

Introduction

High quality research programmes require well developed infrastructure to ensure the effective use of resources. The launch of the first NHS R&D strategy in the early 1990s (DoH 1991) stimulated the development of support and management infrastructures to help research and researchers throughout the NHS. For example, in the South West Region of the NHS (as was) the Regional R&D Directorate commissioned a number of academic R&D Support Units (RDSUs) to advise, train and supervise clinicians interested in taking forward research projects, and several of these RDSUs employed nurses. These nurses often had broad research experience and used their knowledge and skills to help others. RDSUs have now been funded across the country. At the same time, Research Management Offices were established in many NHS Trusts to oversee the use of funds from the R&D Levy, and nurses have often filled these administrative posts. Policy makers and commissioners in all parts of the Britain and Northern Ireland are also much more involved in supporting the strategic development of research (e.g. DoH 2000; FoNS 2001; McKenna & Mason 1998; Welsh Office 1992). See the NHS R&D web pages at www.doh.gov.uk/research/ for an indication of the extent of R&D strategic development.

The national R&D Strategy also led to a number of national research programmes where research projects on prioritised topics have been commissioned. The largest of these national programmes is the NHS R&D Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Programme, currently funding projects worth around £10 million per annum. At the National Co-ordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment (NCCHTA) at the Wessex Institute for Health R&D, University of Southampton, nurses provide scientific support to the HTA programme at Research Assistant, Senior Research Fellow and Senior Lecturer Grades. The Department of Health also commissions research through the Policy Research Programme (PRP) and an advert for a senior position with the PRP can be found at the end of this article. Although the Government funds a substantial amount of research through NHS and Department of Health research programmes and through the research councils, medical research charities also provide a very significant investment in health R&D in the United Kingdom. All these programmes require administrators and scientific support workers with some understanding of research and research management.

The clear difference between the academic pathway (see earlier article) and the research support / management pathway is that in academia nurse researchers will be conducting their own primary research and seeking funding from research sponsors. On the other hand, on the research support / management pathway, nurse researchers will be working either to support research activity in general (e.g. infrastructure within an NHS Trust) or will be working directly for research sponsors in a scientific support role.
In Table 1 we have set out a typical support / management career pathway. This is not meant to be a prescriptive framework but simply indicative of the typical role, experience, knowledge, training, skills and qualifications one might normally expect at each level. And of course, the five career pathways described in this series are written so that individuals can see opportunities for transferring from one career pathway to another. Indeed, this pattern of pathway transfer may even become the norm with individuals gaining a range of skills and experience in different environments that could then be applied fruitfully in other roles.

**Career development**

Many people begin as research assistants on specific research projects and then move into more of a research support or management role once they have sufficient experience of undertaking research.

At Research Officer level you will have had some experience as a researcher and will be developing your skills in project management. You may be involved in writing briefing papers to support the research commissioning process, or in organising and managing the peer review process. It is during this period that you are likely to broaden your knowledge and skills through Masters level education.

As a Senior Research Officer or Senior Research Fellow you are likely to have substantial experience in project management and in supervising junior staff. At Principal Research Officer or Research Director level you will have substantial responsibility for a research programme or for the support and management of research activity within a Trust or academic R&D Support Unit.

**Benefits of a Career in Research Support / Management**

- Often there is better job security than in junior researcher posts where funding is linked to a time limited research study
- Senior posts can be well paid
- The knowledge that you are helping others to undertake high quality research that will improve our knowledge base

**Drawbacks of the Job**

- Low pay and sometimes limited career prospects, especially at junior levels
- No clear career structure for nurses who choose the research support / management pathway
- Lack of opportunity to conduct own research
Links To Other Pathways
The knowledge and skills gained from working for a research funding programme may be useful if transferring to an academic pathway where you will be expected to compete for research funds. Nurses who have worked in academic R&D Support Units (RDSUs) have often been involved in delivering education and training courses and in supervising clinical colleagues and this experience may also be useful on an academic pathway where education and course administration are often required as part of the role.

Links to other Careers
A good research support / management CV will enable you to obtain work in a number of settings - overseas, the private sector, clinical governance, and also as an independent consultant. In addition, some nurses may move across from a support / management career into a general management pathway where they use their knowledge and experience to help manage and run health services.

Qualifications
Individuals who work in research support and management need to have a range of skills, and qualifications that cover management, administration, research design and methods, epidemiology, health economics would all be useful. Some individuals may move into research support / management with a PhD but as a PhD tends to be a narrowly focused programme of study other, more generic, education and training is likely to be required.

Pay scales
These vary between employers who may take clinical experience and salary into account. For many posts, the pay scales will be similar to academic related pay scales:

Table 1. Guidance for pay scales in research support / management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/position</th>
<th>Pay ranges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research assistant/associate</td>
<td>£16,775 to £18,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research fellow/Officer</td>
<td>£18,731 to £34,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior research fellow/Officer</td>
<td>£23,880 to £39,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Research Officer/Director</td>
<td>£28,600 to £47,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curriculum Vitae

Although personnel departments like to see a completed application form, it is usually good practice to also send a detailed curriculum vitae (CV), especially for senior appointments. This does not mean the precise documentation of all your activities at work and at play from secondary school onwards. It is actually a document that illustrates your achievements and abilities, in order, to demonstrate your appropriateness for employment for the job advertised. It has to be remembered that those wishing to employ new staff have normally decided the essential and desirable characteristics required, so in reading your CV they need to feel that you have considered these necessary requirements.

Places jobs advertised

Health Services Journal
Guardian (Tuesday, Wednesday)
www.jobs.ac.uk

Example job adverts

Research and Development Manager
XXXX Hospitals NHS Trust
Circa £30,000

We are looking for a R&D Manager to lead and develop service and organisational research. You will strengthen and transform R&D strategy within the overall governance strategy for the Trust and will facilitate, administer, monitor and publicise all research activities in the XXXX Trust in order to ensure that the Trust meets regional and national R&D reporting requirements.

You should have previous NHS R&D experience and a university degree.
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH •
PRINCIPAL RESEARCH OFFICERS (2 POSTS)
London £28,600 - £47,250

The Department of Health's Policy Research Programme, part of the Research and Development Division, commissions external researchers to carry out a range of exciting and innovative research projects. These are designed to provide evidence on strategic policy issues. We are currently looking for two Principal Research Officers to manage research, one in the field of social care – possibly covering both adult and child areas - and another covering public health and health service issues. In both positions you will have responsibility for managing projects and programmes already in place, and for commissioning new work that is policy relevant, and of a high scientific quality. Ensuring that evidence is easily accessible is an important part of the job. As well as a good social science degree, you should have a proven record of applied research and experience of research management. Most current post holders also have a post-graduate qualification. A knowledge of policy for social care, public health and health services, and of research and the research communities in these fields, is also desirable. You will need a sound appreciation of a wide variety of research methods and their potential for addressing applied issues. Able to lead, influence and earn respect, you will be able to orchestrate decisions from senior civil servants, academics, and health services personnel, across disciplinary and agency boundaries. You should be a self-starter, with first rate organisational and communication skills, capable of working with minimal supervision and to changing priorities. The appointment covering social care will be offered on a three year fixed term basis; the other is for one year only. For both posts there is the possibility of extension or permanency. Secondment and part-time working will be considered.

Feedback

Any comments or feedback that could assist other nurses to develop their career to the RCN R&D Co-ordinating Centre c/o Dave O’Carroll

www.man.ac.uk/rcn/

References:


FoNS (Foundation of Nursing Studies) Research and Evidence Based Practice. FoNS: London.


## Nursing Research Careers: Research Support / Management Pathway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Typical Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Usual Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistant or Associate / Research Nurse</td>
<td>Involved in support and administration of programmatic research activity, either for a research purchaser (e.g. may write briefing papers on particular topics to support decision making) or a research provider (e.g. may support and co-ordinate research activity by others, or may be involved in supporting research utilization activity)</td>
<td>Clinical experience at post-registration level</td>
<td>Knowledge of the health service; good understanding of the value of research to the health service</td>
<td>Post-registration training in critical appraisal skills, audit or research methods</td>
<td>Numerate; IT skills; literature review skills; ability to work independently and in a research team; good time management; ability to project manage</td>
<td>UKCC Registration; Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Officer / Research Fellow</td>
<td>Senior operational role – may take project lead in support and administration of programmatic research activity; also likely to have input into strategic developments.</td>
<td>Experience in supporting research utilization programmatic activity at a clinical or organisational level.</td>
<td>Knowledge of research design and methodological approaches; good understanding of when to bring in expertise from other professions (e.g. statisticians, economists); knowledge of research information resources</td>
<td>Masters level training with substantial research component</td>
<td>Good project management skills; may also have protocol development skills</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Research Officer / Senior Research Fellow</td>
<td>Executive role. Likely to provide strong scientific input to operational activities; will have overall responsibility and a broad overview of organisational activity and management; will provide strong strategic lead to the organisation (possibly in consultation with advisors). Very active in building strong relationships to support the programme/organisation.</td>
<td>Experience in project management and line management in health services or higher education.</td>
<td>Good knowledge of project and line management techniques; strong scientific and critical appraisal knowledge; good knowledge of research implementation approaches; understanding of the relevance of particular research topics to the NHS</td>
<td>Management or administration training</td>
<td>Good supervision skills; may have some expertise in particular research/clinical areas, but likely to be a generalist rather than a specialist (broad band skills and knowledge). Should lead by example.</td>
<td>PhD, but not a pre-requisite. MBA or MPH may be just as useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Research Officer / Research Director</td>
<td>Experience in strategic development and management in health services or higher education. Substantial committee experience (member and chair).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good understanding of the national R&amp;D agenda and mechanisms; Good understanding of important strategic and operational issues in the health service</td>
<td>Continuing professional development</td>
<td>Ability to lead and motivate others; ability to build research infrastructure; ability to network effectively</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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