Are you a researcher as well as a medical illustrator?

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When we list the areas of practice for medical illustrators we always include research, but how involved in research are we? The aim of this activity is to encourage your professional development not just as a medical illustrator but your involvement with research whether that is undertaking your own research, undertaking evidence based practice[[1]](#endnote-1), working as part of a research team, advising researchers on the value of medical illustration or supporting a student undertaking a research project for their degree or post-graduate qualification.

Activity – What is you current awareness about research?

This can be viewed as a personal activity looking at what you do or collectively as a team based activity to see what is happening in your department and wider environment. The questions below are designed to get you thinking. However, depending on your personal circumstances some of them may not be as applicable.

* Looking at your Continuing Professional Development portfolio does this include a research element? Examples of activity recommended by the Health Professional Council and Institute of Medical Illustrators includes research and supervising research as activities[[2]](#endnote-2).
* If you are actively engaged in research is it ready for presentation or publication?
* What area or areas of practice have you always wanted to research and investigate further? Could this be turned into a research project?
* Are you already undertaking research for a pharmaceutical company without realizing it? This is one of the questions Young asks in his 1985 paper “Medical photographers don't carry out research, do they?” [[3]](#endnote-3)
* Could you become more involved with research work being undertaken by junior doctors that you already assist?
* What research projects are being undertaken locally in your hospital or University or more widely in your region?
* Do you go to any of the meetings at your local Postgraduate Medical Centre or Medical Education Centre?
* Is there a research group or centre that you could approach to see if they need collaborators?
* Looking at papers that have been published recently or in the past in the Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine do any of these need further research, give you ideas for avenues that could be explored or applied and then reported on as case studies?

These questions are also possible directions and ideas that you could use to develop research as part of your personal development planning and career.

Research resources

It is good to have research as an aim or goal but how do you go about developing this area of practice? It might be that you are asked to support or mentor a student undertaking a Major project or Independent Study as part of their degree or postgraduate study. You may even be fortunate enough to be able to set a project that a student will be willing to carry out with your supervision.

A good starting point would be using one of the many books on undertaking research e.g. Developing a healthcare research proposal[[4]](#endnote-4), Doing a literature review in heath and social care[[5]](#endnote-5), Research for Evidence-Based Practice in Healthcare[[6]](#endnote-6), Research Handbook for Health Care Professionals[[7]](#endnote-7), Statistics workbook for evidence-based healthcare[[8]](#endnote-8) or research projects or for those more interested in research support specific to medical illustrators and clinical photographers look at the series of papers already available online. These all begin with the general heading “Research for medical illustrators: “ e.g. Research for medical illustrators: Searching for references.

Part 1: the research process and planning research[[9]](#endnote-9).

Part 2: Trial design, protocols, results and reporting[[10]](#endnote-10).

Designing Photographic Protocols[[11]](#endnote-11).

Searching for references[[12]](#endnote-12).

Photographic measurement[[13]](#endnote-13).

Using Linear Scales in Photographs[[14]](#endnote-14).

Photographic Photometry[[15]](#endnote-15).

These are about the research process with most orientated towards photography but a good source of advice for other areas of medical illustration practice is to look at research papers that have already been published in this and other journals in your specialist area of interest.

Activity – What are your personal goals or professional directions? Do they or might they include research?

This could be a short term or longer term aim and is seen as a valuable direction in a clinical career:

“Healthcare professionals across the country deliver the best possible care. Critical to this, is having the best evidence available to inform clinical decisions and these are often based on results from a range of research studies.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

Research could become a personal career direction through the Modernising Scientific Careers (MSC) programme[[17]](#endnote-17) for example research is a key part of Higher Specialist Scientific Training (HSST) and for those looking for a clinical academic career pathway.

Would further education enhance your career prospects? For example; through a Masters programme or PhD, whether part-time or full-time. Funding and support is available nationally through MSC, National Institute for Health Research Trainees Coordinating Centre (NIHR TCC, <http://www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk>), Professional and Career Development Loans (<https://www.gov.uk/career-development-loans/overview>) and smaller amounts through the Institute of Medical Illustrators scholarships (<http://www.imi.org.uk/news-item/imi-scholarships>). Part of your planning could be to develop a research project for professional recognition e.g. Fellowship of the Institute of Medical Illustrators (http://www.imi.org.uk/page/fellowship-of-the-institute ).

Activity – What research is going on in your specialism?

If you need further convincing of the value of research try going to http://scholar.google.co.uk and type in your area of practice e.g “Clinical photography” or “Graphic Design for Medicine”, “Medical art” and the word research. A quick read through several pages will give you an idea of how much and what type of work is taking place. Even narrowing it down further by clinical speciality e.g. “Dermatological photography” or “Since 2012” will still give you a large number of papers for inspiration.

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