

Establish a Research Support Room in your institution / healthcare facility

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Design: Mercedes Rumi, Nicole Feune de Colombi, Steffani Herring-Hall

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What is a Researcher's Support Room?

Researcher's Support Room is a dedicated space where research projects are encouraged and nurtured through discussions and guidance (for example, in a healthcare facility).

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The idea is to offer technical guidance and support to those interested in conducting research. This includes, but is not limited to:

- healthcare professionals (for example; doctors, nurses, lab technicians) wanting to conduct research in their facilities for the first time
- early career researchers looking for mentorship
- experienced scientists seeking for peer-qualified external opinion to improve their investigation



Within this space, discussion regarding research methods and project development take place. The aim is to encourage good quality studies by using the appropriate methods, following ethical standards, and achieving results that are relevant.

Background

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, the University Hospital of Brasilia – University of Brasilia assembled a dedicated committee to give institutional support to any relevant COVID-19 research initiatives. Professionals who had long desired to get involved in research, and researchers who had been less active in the field in recent years, were encouraged to join this institutional effort.

“Interacting with researchers, we noticed weakness in the research proposals, open flaws in their methodology, and limited experience with clinical research methods -that could be corrected with little guidance, but also eagerness in joining the global efforts to fight the pandemic and openness to discuss their proposals and receive technical and methodological advice.”



"We realized then that there was an unmet need underlying this scenario that extended beyond the scope of the pandemic represented, for example, by the enthusiasm of professionals in our Institution who had long been desiring to get involved with clinical research, but dealt with methodological and other practical difficulties that kept them apart from achieving the goal."



The University Hospital of Brasilia acknowledged the unmet need as an opportunity and created the **Researcher's Support Room** in October 2020, an enduring service to offer support for healthcare professionals – and anyone who wants to conduct health research – in the design and development of any health research project.



Why create a Researcher's Support Room?

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With proper guidance and methodological support, most professionals who seek aid from the Researcher's Support Room will **increase participation in clinical research**, resulting in more evidence and thus improvement of clinical practice.



The Researcher's Support Room is important too for **networking and enhancing or catalyzing collaborations** and networks between scientists seeking support and other more experienced researchers who work in the specific field that can offer mentoring.



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Also, it provides a platform to motivate candidates and further their **motivation to seek formal post-graduation programmes**, for sponsorship and supervision.



Impact of the Researcher's Support Room in the University Hospital of Brasilia

Since the Researcher's Support Room started in October 2020, in the first year it has run more than 115 online and in-person technical and methodological advising sessions related to more than 40 projects, and serving more than 80 interested professionals. Further, 16 researchers entered a formal postgraduate (Master's or PhD) degree program under direct assistance from the Room, by offering methodological guidance or through intermediating access to faculty advisors in the University of Brasilia and other Institutions.



"A surge in scientific projects was observed in our Institution, and among the projects the committee has worked with, many have published results in a short period of time."¹



Given its accrued experience in mapping and dealing with researchers' difficulties, the Room has also been invited to participate, along with other institutional counterparts, in the ongoing revision and development of the hospital's overall research policy. Finally, the Room became a bridge between research groups in our hospital and in Faculties in the University of Brasilia and other Institutions, even abroad.



"The University Hospital of Brasília despite being a tertiary healthcare facility, focused in high-complexity assistance, is small in its size and workforce. Thus, these achievements in so little time are surprising even to us. We believe we are contributing to solve unmet needs in our hospital, through the Researcher's Support Room, and that this Project (once replicated) could also benefit other hospitals where clinical researchers might find challenges like those we have been observing in our Institution."



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Step 1 - How does the Researcher Support Room Work?

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Setting up the Research Support Room

Human Resources



- **Qualified research advisors**
 - with formal training and experience in clinical research and scientific methodology are required.
 - ideally and whenever possible, each project should be assessed and discussed by two simultaneous advisors.
- Having a **statistician** in the Room is useful, but it is not essential if the advisors have a good understanding of quantitative methods in clinical research (including basic statistics).
- If possible, it is helpful to have an **admin staff** who organises the *Room's* agenda.

Physical Resources



- A **suitable room** inside the hospital or institution. This one can be shared with other groups but not at the same time.
- A large table for the meeting. Sometimes there can be a group of up to 8–10 researchers involved in the same project.
- A computer with access to the internet, as some virtual meeting platforms or software for online appointments, will be required.

Time

The most important element for the Researcher's Support Room to be successful is **time**. Carefully reading the projects and understanding the aims, interests and ideas of the researchers is essential to identify and suggest improvements. Research advisors should have time allocated each week for the Research Support Room activities.



- The total amount of time required to run the project will depend on the local demand.

"In the University Hospital of Brasilia, for instance, the Researcher's Support Room is open to the public (upfront reservation required) for two 4-hour periods per week. The secretary is available to receive appointment requests during regular working hours, five days a week."

Step 2 - How does the Researcher Support Room Work?

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Day-to-day operations

Teams or individuals seeking support will first make an appointment.

- Each session lasts 1.5 hrs
- The meetings can be run online or in person, according to the researchers' preferences

First Encounter	The Research Question <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The team will focus on understanding the real interests of the researcher(s) and help towards developing a good research question.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many will have only a general idea about what they want to study at that moment. Others will bring a research project in hand.• Either way, the team will go through these questions in detail, aiming at helping the researcher to end up with one or more clear, focused, well structured, relevant, ethical, and feasible research questions that should still be interesting and motivating to them.• It may take one or more encounters to achieve a proper research question.
Subsequent Encounters	Research Methodology <p>Once the research question is established (and a testable hypothesis is clearly formulated in case of analytical studies), proceed to review in detail, together with the researcher(s), the methods required to answer the question.</p> <p>Focus on the general study design, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a clear delimitation of the target population• sampling techniques and sample size• recruitment, randomisation (when appropriate)• interventions, comparisons• outcomes and their timeframes• variables in study• measurement tools• statistical methods• data analysis• ethical requirements

Final Encounters

Implementation

Finally, address the operational aspects of the project:

- project submission to institutional review boards;
- protocol registering and availability through public repositories;
- technical expertise requirements;
- access to specific resources needed (equipment, tools, materials, etc.);
- standardised procedures to data collection and monitoring;
- research budget and funding sources; and
- realistic timelines for conducting all the research processes.

Going through all the steps may take several encounters, depending on the previous expertise of the researcher(s).

Further reading and useful materials

- **Protocol Development Steps toolkit:** find guidance on all elements of Protocol development in addition to practical advice such as how to navigate regulations and guidelines, the importance of community engagement, and tips on collaborative writing.
- **Study Cycle Main Resources:** Useful documents and links divided into sections: Study Design and Planning; Ethics and Regulations; Study Procedures; Data Collection, Management, and Analysis; and Study Operations
- **Quality Management Toolkit:** set forth the principles for good research practices, helping teams to consider the quality practices and processes of their study, through the actions and measures that are carried out by the team to ensure the quality and consistency of the study results they wish to achieve.
- **Study Walk-through:** translate your protocol into an accurate and successful study. This toolkit describes the study walkthrough approach, why it might be of benefit to your study and how you can successfully implement the method using practical examples and 'How to' guidance.
- **Data Science:**
 - **Data Management Basics**
 - **Data Management Steps**
 - **Data Management Plan**
 - Access free online short course: Introduction to Data Management for Clinical Research Studies
 - **Statistics for beginners:** A presentation on basic statistics in clinical research [PDF, 2.7mb]
 - An introduction to basic statistics workshop
 - **Completing a statistical analysis plan:** A video on completing a prospective, fixed statistical analysis plan, prior to study initiation

