



Debunking the Myths of Research

By Dr Elaine Chew Chu Shan, Consultant, Adolescent Medicine Service, Department of Paediatrics, KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Research can be an overwhelming thought in a busy clinical practice and ridden with many myths for some clinicians.



Myth #1: Research Can Only Be Done by Elite Few

While undergoing training in paediatrics, my perception of research was that it was only done by an elite few. However, the gaps in clinical service became more apparent to me as I came in close contact with children and adolescents struggling with obesity and eating disorders when I became a paediatrician specialising in adolescent medicine. Speaking to patients during consultation, the burning question in my mind slowly evolved from:

“What is the best care I can provide for this patient sitting in front of me?” to “What is the best care that I can provide for *the next patient* with the same condition?” My path to research, which began with coming up with a seemingly simple idea of family based intervention for adolescents with obesity, was where **I learnt that if I want to change something, I have to first measure it** (be it quantitatively or qualitatively). It was a steep learning curve; I had to learn how to apply for grants to gaining ethics board approval, present at research rounds as well as have discussions with statisticians and experienced researchers on how to conduct an intervention trial for my project.

Myth #2: As a Senior Doctor, You Know a lot about Research

There are many forms of research and the main difficulty I face is that although I am a senior physician in my field, I am very junior in the field of research. Acknowledging this gap, and being humble and receptive to feedback from more experienced researchers has helped to guide me along my journey so far. **Valuing the importance of collaborations with various departments, researchers, and statisticians, as well as finding a good mentor to help refine your research ideas, is pivotal.**

Myth #3: Research is a Very Difficult Topic to Understand

While there is clearly no one-stop shop to understand more about research, **joining the Master of Clinical Investigation (MCI) Programme has been very helpful in providing a basic foundation to the various aspects of research ranging from biostatistics to medical ethics and epidemiology.** The most valuable aspect of the MCI will be meeting like-minded clinicians to share research ideas and the struggles of clinical research. As one of my classmates has aptly put it, “We meet people with equally crazy ideas.”

Myth #4: Research is a One Man Show



Conducting research has its up and down moments; and it may feel like a lonely journey at times. I have, however, learnt when to take a step back and ask for advice from supportive seniors. I am grateful to my entire Adolescent Medicine team for courageously embarking on this research journey together and bringing some of my research ideas to fruition. I hope that I can pay it forward and encourage more clinicians to undertake research amidst their busy clinical work.

My question in my mind has evolved to *“What is the most efficacious, cost-effective, sustainable care that I can provide to my next patient?”*

The struggle to answer this question continues.

About the Author



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A keen researcher, Dr Elaine Chew specialises in the management of adolescents with complex health issues, obesity and eating disorders. In 2016 Dr Chew completed further specialist training in adolescent medicine at The Children's Hospital at Westmead in Sydney, Australia.

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