

The BANCC research forum: championing cardiovascular nurse researchers

Rosalynn Austin and Tootie Bueser report on the BANCC's online forum for existing and aspiring cardiovascular nurse researchers to find out what is needed to support and champion these individuals in this challenging field.

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On 19 November 2020, the British Association for Nursing in Cardiovascular Care (BANCC) held a free cardiovascular nurse researcher virtual forum for its members, hosted by the British Heart Foundation-Clinical Research Collaborative (BHF-CRC). The BANCC's president, Liz Williams, welcomed and challenged all attendees to use this research forum to promote, celebrate and share research fellowships, opportunities and achievements within the greater BANCC community.

Allyson Arnold, Chief Operating Officer of the BHF-CRC, shared the highlights of the organisation's research strategy. Ultimately, their aim is to support and develop cardiovascular research to ensure that it is of the highest quality and has a practical impact on cardiovascular care internationally. The BHF-CRC was formed to support all cardiovascular societies. They aim to partner their members to clinical trial units and other supportive research partners to form a collaborative network of research groups. They strive to have an inclusive approach to research, including nurse researchers, regardless of funding streams within cardiology. This support will help the new BANCC research forum to grow as they look to engage with the broader research community and to develop future researchers by providing valuable services and formulating relevant research questions to conduct high-impact clinical research studies. The BANCC research forum could provide the platform to create cross-cultural research projects, allowing coverage of patient groups and clinical issues that have previously been neglected.

Nurses in cardiovascular research

Professor Christi Deaton, Florence Nightingale Foundation Chair of Clinical Nursing Research at the University of Cambridge, then set the stage for a lively group discussion by painting a picture of the current landscape of cardiovascular nursing research. Professor Deaton's presentation highlighted the need for improvement in this area as, while robust cardiovascular research is performed in the UK, nurse-led research is under-represented within cardiology research. She shared figures from a UK survey of research fellowships, which highlighted how few nurses pursue a PhD qualification compared to other health professionals. Those nurses who do complete a PhD are then even less likely to continue on to independent research (Medical Research Council, 2017). While research training opportunities exist, there is clearly a need to support nurse researchers across their career trajectories and make research integral to nursing practice. Nurse researchers in cardiology need to be encouraged, mentored and acknowledged. Professor Deaton finished by asking attendees what they thought the BANCC should do to support existing cardiovascular nurse researchers. The forum then became a lively discussion, from which three main themes arose.

Nurse research leaders and where to find them

Many of the attendees highlighted the need for mentorship and supervision, stating that finding someone with the right skills for a given research project is more important than a mentor within a given clinical professional group. However, certain research funders and universities require that a nurse doing a PhD has a nurse supervisor. Attendees of the online forum suggested creating a list of nurse researchers in cardiology to make finding a

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supervisor easier, but this had been tried previously without success. This led to the question to all cardiovascular nurse researchers nationally: 'Are you visible beyond your research group?' Professor Deaton advised that all early career and aspiring nurse researchers should look for a mentor who would challenge them to develop.

Cardiovascular nurse research mentorship

The BANCC has plans to build more mentorship into their programmes, including research, using virtual platforms to increase accessibility to all aspiring cardiovascular nurse researchers. In addition to the identification of these mentors, there is also a need for current cardiovascular nurse researchers to publish and share their experiences. The path to a career in research is often convoluted and setbacks are common, so it is important for those who have been successful to highlight their challenges and achievements to inspire others.

While the publication of written papers will contribute to this, it seems that nursing could learn much from how other health professionals use social media (such as virtual workspaces, tweet chats, blogs and podcasts) to support, celebrate and network between their researchers.

Which pathway is the right one?

The differences between professional doctorate qualifications, PhDs and clinical academic roles were highlighted by the attendees, who felt that mentors need to have open and honest discussions with aspiring researchers regarding which pathway is the right one for them. For example, a professional doctorate is more likely to lead to a clinical expert role, whereas an individual with a PhD usually becomes a research expert. The different roles and pathways for researchers mean that there are more opportunities for nurses to collaborate, highlighting each other's strengths.

Next steps for the BANCC

A momentum is growing around research in the UK (Bueser, 2019). The Care Quality Commission now evaluates trusts' performance in research (National Institute for Health Research, 2019), while the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in research regularly featuring in the news. The BANCC has a responsibility to its members to connect with other health researchers to provide opportunities and support existing cardiovascular nurse researchers, adopting the BHF-CRC themes of inclusivity and working together to produce effective research projects. The creation of the BANCC online research forum is a step towards supporting and developing cardiovascular nurse researchers. Going forwards, a working group will be organised to investigate the possibility of holding virtual meetings to provide a combination of training, mentorship and highlighting of members' achievements.

If you would like to join the BANCC research forum and help to shape the future of cardiovascular nurse researchers, please email Toefila 'Tootie' Bueser at tootie.bueser@nhs.net.

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