

PRUK Mentorship Handbook

Purpose

This document provides information on a mentorship scheme for pharmacy professionals who seek advice, guidance and support with their research endeavours. This document outlines the structure of the mentorship scheme, in addition to further resources available.

Introduction

Pharmacy Research UK ¹ (PRUK) is a research funding charity, dedicated to promoting health service research in pharmacy and developing pharmacy professionals in the UK, by:

- Supporting the production of timely evidence that informs policy and practice relating to pharmacy's contribution to the health of the public, medicines and their use
- Building pharmacy practice research capacity and capability through training bursaries, postgraduate research funding, fellowships and grants
- Engaging stakeholders, stimulating debate and spreading knowledge about medicines and their use to the wider healthcare community and the public

PRUK's mentorship scheme has been established to help and support pharmacy professionals who are looking to participate in research. The purpose of the scheme is two-fold:

1. To be a standalone mentorship scheme for pharmacy professionals wishing to engage with research
2. To form a mutual relationship whereby PRUK mentors and mentees can benefit from access to RPS research support and PRUK can provide a pool of mentors specialising in research to the RPS

This mentorship scheme is ideal for pharmacy professionals who do not have the support they need in their current research endeavours and require mentorship to help them in reaching their own goals. For instance, you may be leading a small project, be a co-applicant on a larger project, or want guidance on a future career within research – a mentor may be helpful to you in these cases, especially if there is a lack of appropriate support from a local Higher Education Institution.

This handbook is designed to provide further information on the PRUK mentorship scheme and what is required in order to make the most out of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Why is mentorship important in research?

Researchers face many challenges, particularly during the early stages of their career. There are many different processes involved in undertaking a research project and the process, as a whole, is not a linear one. Mentorship offers an opportunity for someone with experience and expertise to provide guidance on the different aspects of the research cycle, as well as providing support and opportunities to network with peers.

¹ PRUK is the principle funder of pharmacy research in the UK. Founded as a result of a merger in 2012 of two previous research funding charities, PRUK has a broad programme of research in place. PRUK funds both research projects and individual bursaries to improve skills across the pharmacy sector. Registered charity number 1148335.

PRUK is dedicated to ensuring that pharmacy professionals looking to engage with research are provided with the tools and support necessary to develop their research capacity. Mentorship is a great example of one of the ways in which support can be provided to pharmacy professionals who are looking to enhance their research careers, figure out their next steps, or just gain further expertise about the research process.

For mentors

Benefits

Mentoring can be a highly rewarding process as you support and make a difference to the professional development of a mentee. Mentoring can also improve your leadership and interpersonal skills with other colleagues in the profession. Being effective in the mentoring process is not just determined by having a good track record. An effective mentor is one who is able to help the mentee to identify what their next steps to development are and where the pitfalls along that journey may lie. Mentoring will also help you in your RPS Faculty journey.

Considerations

Many professionals who have experience of research within pharmacy may already possess the skills needed to be an effective mentor. Before signing up to any mentorship scheme however, you should:

- Consider if you are interested in helping someone to develop their skills and to progress, while supporting them throughout that journey
- Consider your availability before committing to become a mentor so that you can get the most from the scheme and be committed to attend scheduled sessions
- Have an understanding on what expertise you can provide to your mentee and how you can contribute to the scheme

Guidelines

The role of the mentor is not to undertake any work on behalf of the mentee or collaborate on research projects. The mentor should also not be considered to supervise any active projects. Rather, mentors should act as a sounding board for any ideas or future plans that the mentee has and help them to think about the advantages and disadvantages of each potential path. Furthermore, the mentor should help, encourage and support the mentee as they develop. We would expect the mentor to work with the mentee to agree an appropriate timeline for their goal to be achieved from the outset, so that good progress can be made and the mentee is clear on what is expected. Although mentors can specify their preferred mode of contact with the mentee, it is good practice and therefore strongly encouraged that the first meeting with the mentee should take place face to face.

For mentees

Benefits

Mentees can benefit greatly from the expertise, knowledge and guidance that a mentor can provide them with. Mentors can assist you in goal setting, help you to identify the next steps needed in order to get closer to meeting your aims and provide further direction through potential networking opportunities. We recognise that this mentorship scheme will be a good opportunity for those who

do not have any formal support in place, however please note that mentors will not be available to provide any research supervision. Instead, the mentors can assist you in reaching your goals and potentially increase your networking opportunities.

Considerations

PRUK are dedicated to ensuring that pharmacy professionals who are new to research, possess the skills, knowledge and experience they need in order to enhance research excellence within pharmacy. Before signing up to this mentorship scheme, you should:

- Have a clear understanding on what you are looking to improve or seek guidance on
- Be prepared to work collaboratively with the mentor in order to make the most out of the scheme
- Be committed to attending sessions as agreed with your mentor

Guidelines

Mentees should not expect the mentor to undertake any work on behalf of them or to endorse any work being carried out by the mentee. The mentee can expect to be open and honest with the mentor on what it is they are looking to develop, improve or achieve in their professional career. As the mentee, you should be working to the recommendations set by your mentor and take the initiative to schedule catch-ups following your discussions with the mentor on the appropriate frequency of these meetings. Mentees should be arranging these sessions and taking the initiative to be prepared prior to each meeting, in order to maximise the benefits of the scheme for both the mentee and mentor.

Being a mentee is about having an idea and the job of a mentor is to grow that idea and inspire the mentee to make it happen. It's about dispelling myths, building skills and navigating barriers.

The mentoring structure

The PRUK mentoring scheme has been designed to be as flexible and supportive as possible to the participants involved. As outlined in the *Introduction* section, this scheme benefits from being PRUK focussed, as well as collaborative with the RPS where further support tools are available. It all depends on the requirements of the mentee and mentor, while the PRUK team are on hand to provide as much support as possible to both parties.

Understandably, the requirements of the mentee and the expertise of the mentor will dictate the course of the relationship. Where possible, PRUK will ensure that mentees will be matched up with the mentor who will be better placed to provide the appropriate support. This will be based on the expertise and experience that the mentor has, as well as the support they are willing to offer to the mentee. However, additional support is available at the mentee's disposal through resources such as the Research Advice Surgeries, Research Evidence and Evaluation Toolkit, or Map of Evidence, which are provided by the RPS. Participants of the PRUK Mentorship scheme can benefit from access to most of these resources and members of the RPS can enjoy full access. Further information on the relationship between PRUK and the RPS is provided in the *RPS Partnership* section of this document.

The mentoring arrangement and process

To start, PRUK will make available mentor and mentee registration forms on the PRUK website. The mentors will be asked how much time they can commit to the scheme, why they wish to be a

mentor and a bit about the expertise they can provide to the scheme. Mentees will similarly be asked how much time they can commit to the scheme, why they feel they need a mentor at that stage of their career and what they are looking to achieve overall. A member of the PRUK team will then arrange to have a conversation with the mentee who is seeking support and delve deeper into what support they are looking for, so the most appropriate support can be provided (be it via a mentor or other existing services already available).

The PRUK team will provide a match-up service based on the needs of the mentees and the expertise of the mentors to ensure that both parties can benefit from the relationship. The mentee would be notified of which mentor they have been matched with, confirm if they are happy to proceed with their assigned mentor. The mentor will then be notified to confirm that they are confident they can support the mentee. All information will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Once both parties have been notified, the first point of action is for the mentee to set-up a meeting, either face-to-face, by telephone or virtually, with the mentor. The mentee will be expected to kick-off the discussions and clearly explain what guidance they require. The mentor-mentee relationship can then develop from there. It is advised that the meetings occur frequently, so that any momentum on progress is not lost and continuous support and guidance is provided.

The PRUK team are keen for both the mentor and the mentee to feel comfortable in the relationship and to get the most out of the scheme, therefore we will be checking in with both the mentor and mentee at regular intervals to see how things are progressing and alleviate any concerns that may arise during the process. There will also be opportunities to provide further resources, should there be a requirement for this, in the course of the relationship.

It is recommended that the mentor-mentee relationship does not exceed six months, therefore it is advisable that any targets or goals are set-up with the view for the mentee to be on track to achieving those aims in that timeframe. The relationship can last longer, depending on the requirements of the mentee and the time capacity available from the mentor. Mentors are welcome to support several mentees at any one time and mentees can have multiple mentors, specific to their requirements.

The RPS

PRUK benefits from a unique working relationship with the RPS. One of the aims of the RPS is to promote and develop research within pharmacy and PRUK is also dedicated to this objective. As a result, we at PRUK provide as much support, guidance, tools and knowledge as we can to help pharmacy professionals get onto the research career path and expand their knowledge about research. The PRUK Mentoring Scheme will allow for additional support to be provided to professionals who wish to develop their skills and capabilities within research even further. As a result of this, the RPS can benefit from our dedication to increasing research capacity within pharmacy, as PRUK can provide a database of professionals who have expertise within research. This is useful for mentees who are currently signed up to the RPS Mentorship scheme and who may seek further support within research. PRUK is happy to work closely with professionals and provide opportunities for further support through a dedicated scheme specialising in research support. In return, PRUK can benefit from access to RPS resources. The RPS Research and Evaluation team have developed new tools to enhance research skills acquisition, as well as resources to raise awareness of research taking place within the landscape of pharmacy research funding, thereby increasing collaboration and networking between researchers and pharmacy professionals across the UK. Further information on these resources is available on the [RPS website](#).

Acknowledgments

The PRUK team would like to thank colleagues at the RPS Research and Evaluation team for their continued support. This continued collaborative working arrangement has meant that pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists can benefit from additional resources to develop and expand their research skills, in order to enhance research excellence within pharmacy for the benefit of patients and the public.

References

Pharmacy Research UK: <http://pharmacyresearchuk.org/>

Royal Pharmaceutical Society: <https://www.rpharms.com/network/mentoring/search/mentoring>

Academy of Medical Sciences: <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/grants-and-schemes/mentoring-and-other-schemes/mentoring-scheme>

