

Research at the heart of rheumatology

Rheumatology is a branch of medicine that deals with the investigation, diagnosis and management of patients with arthritis and other musculo-skeletal conditions.



The rheumatology research team

We started clinical commercial research in rheumatology at Whipps Cross hospital in the 1980s. However, the team only really started to grow and flourish in the late nineties with the arrival of biological therapies for inflammatory Rheumatological conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, and ankylosing spondylitis.

The team is led by Dr Hasan Tahir and now comprises of three consultants, one clinical fellow, five research nurses, two data managers and one start-up/finance specialist. Between them the team have in excess of 100 years clinical trial experience and they're committed to providing state of the art quality care for our patients in a dedicated research unit.

An often overlooked benefit of clinical trials is the savings the NHS makes when patients enrol in clinical trials. Since 2000, we estimate almost £7.5 million has been saved by the Trust because rheumatology clinical trial participants at Whipps Cross were receiving medications provided free of charge by pharmaceutical companies.

Clinical staff who get involved with research are often among the first to acquire knowledge and experience of drugs under development. So, when a drug is approved and made available to patients, their first-hand experience becomes invaluable in the training and support for other clinical staff. For many research staff, rewards also come in the form of being part of a team who bring about many positive changes that occur in patients' lives as a result of new therapies.

Key to the rheumatology research team's success is effective communication and engagement with patients. Clinical trials, though hugely beneficial to patients, are sometimes a daunting prospect and their professional approach, and knowledge about what is involved, enables them to establish the trust and rapport that is needed to give patients confidence to participate.

The team's commitment to research was recently recognised with two prestigious awards from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). 'Consistently delivers to Time and Target' recognises not only the leadership required to bring a research team together but also the determination to ensure patients have access to clinical trials. The second award, 'NIHR@10' recognises investigators who have consistently delivered commercial studies since the establishment of the NIHR Clinical Research Network 10 years ago (see page 10 for more information).

// It will never be enough to convey my gratitude to you all for the kind, attentive, cheerful and professional way that you have looked after me while I have been in your care //

Why participate in research?

Patients who participate in clinical trials can benefit from:

- early access to novel treatments (as an additional option to NICE approved therapies);
- frequent regular and in-depth health check appointments in accordance with study protocols, (an added benefit being that, by having extra time with staff, patients have more opportunities to learn how to self-manage their condition);
- flexible appointment times around the patient's availability;
- as well as patients being looked after by the same members of the team for the duration of the trial.

If you want to find out more about this, please contact:

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Get hands on with research at the Community Festival of Life

Come along and get hands on with research at Queen Mary University of London's first ever Community Festival. The two week festival in May will bring the local community together to celebrate 'Life', both on campus in Mile End and Whitechapel, and in local community parks and spaces in Tower Hamlets.

From Saturday 21 May to Saturday 4 June, the festival will hold a 'Funday' in Stepney Green Park; an open campus event featuring lots of interactive stalls, plus talks and big demonstrations all around the topic of 'Life', showcasing the very best of our health and wellbeing, science, engineering, humanities and social science projects.

The festival will feature staff and activities from some of the Medical School's research centres including the Cancer Institute, Trauma, Cardiovascular and Neuroscience amongst others, as well as opportunities to find out more about support and activities available in the local community.

Look out for more details and the festival programme which will launch soon at www.qmul.ac.uk/festival

Award winning Barts Health researchers

Each year, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) celebrates the achievements of consultants and clinical academics who provide outstanding contributions to the work of their local comprehensive research networks, part of the UK Clinical Research Network Collaboration (UKCRN). This year, special awards, NIHR@10, have also been made to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the UKCRN.

We're delighted that a number of our clinicians have been awarded Principal Investigator (PI) recognition awards in the 2015/16 awards round. And the Barts Health winners are...

'Consistently Delivers to Time and Target'

Three of our researchers, Dr Chloe Orkin, Dr Hasan Tahir, and Dr Anthony Bewley received NIHR PI recognition awards. All are heavily involved in running clinical trials

in their respective specialties and this award recognises not only this commitment, but also that they always hit their patient recruitment targets on time - a benchmark for efficiency and quality in undertaking clinical research in the NHS.

'First commercial study delivered successfully'

Dr Michele Bombardieri received an award for recruiting to time and target for her Sjögren's syndrome study, funded by Novartis.



'NIHR @ 10' award

Professor Graham Foster and Dr Hasan Tahir received awards as a special mark of recognition to principal investigators who have consistently provided outstanding contributions to the NIHR clinical trials portfolio over its lifetime.

Professor Jo Martin, director of academic health sciences, said: "This is great news for Barts Health, the individuals themselves and the research teams supporting them. All these clinicians are real

experts in clinical trials, working with patients to develop and validate new treatments."

Professor Lyn Chitty, clinical director for CRN: North Thames said: "This award reflects the commitment not just from the individuals awarded but also the research teams. We want to extend our gratitude to them also. I continue to be struck by the enthusiasm and dedication from teams around the network and am proud that so many of the nominees from CRN: North Thames region are to be awarded a prize".