

# How to get funding fo

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Are you thinking about doing research? Do you want to do an MD or PhD? If you think you do, one of the most common concerns is how to get started and how to find the necessary funding.

When considering spending a more significant amount of time to do research, it is firstly very important to know exactly what area of research you want to be working in. You will need to be committed in order to devote the time and energy required to obtain the funding and then executing the research project. I think it is difficult to make a firm commitment to either a subject area or to a period of time away from normal clinical work and training without having a very good idea of what research is about and what a life in research would be like.

The very first step, therefore, towards an MD or PhD is to explore the possible subject area(s) of interest by reading, going to meetings and talking to people. There may be some serendipity in what area seems interesting or appealing – an inspirational teacher, a high-profile lab, a fascinating patient or geographical factors – but make absolutely certain that the field really does appeal to you by seeking out extra knowledge yourself. Then, if you can, add to this by spending at least some time learning the trade of the research area. If it is possible to spend regular time during the week with someone working in the area, then do this. Sometimes the concept of doing research is not the same as the reality, so gain some insights into life in research. There may also be opportunities to spend a shorter period of time in the research department without a full commitment to a two or three-year research period. There may be hospital research trust funds, awards from charities or short-term government funded schemes for research initiation. (See table 1). These will all be obtained via competitive application, but will usually provide some funding towards the expenses of a small research project and will give greater visibility to the commitment to research and experience gained in the skills necessary for a longer period in research.

This sort of award will then give a much better idea of whether or not research, and in particular this area of research, is really for you. When it comes to an application for an MD or PhD, you will need to show not only commitment but also some understanding of the area and ideally some pilot results. Where you do the research is also important. The department should have a track record in this sort of research, the supervisor should ideally have supervised students before and the environment must be supportive of research students. Thus an awarding body would look for a department that has mentors as well as the supervisor, training opportunities for research students in research techniques, writing skills etc. and regular research seminars appropriate for students.

The third important aspect of a research funding application as well as person and place is, of course, the project. Your planned research supervisor should be able to advise and, in many cases, help with the writing of the research proposal. The content and aims should include novel work but at the same time the project must not be too risky and should be likely to succeed within the projected timeframe.

The main funding bodies are listed in Table 2. The Medical Research Council offers clinical research training fellowships, which are usually expected to result in a PhD. The applicant needs to demonstrate commitment to research.

The Wellcome Trust offers clinical PhD programmes in certain recognised centres. These are advertised annually and will be limited by the projects offered by the investigators at the sites. In addition they also offer Research Training Fellowships for a two or three-year period specifically designed for medics post specialty exam (MRCP). Deadlines for application are three times a year. Each application will go to one of the five research boards but there are plenty of opportunities for skin related research in all of these areas.



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The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) also offers academic clinical fellowships. These have been previously discussed in the newsletter articles of Autumn 2008 and Spring 2010. Some charities also offer fellowships to cover up to 3 years of full-time research. Cancer Research UK offers clinical research training fellowships but only within their recognised cancer centres. There are also Cancer Research UK institutes at Cambridge, Glasgow, Oxford, Manchester and London. The research projects will depend on the investigators working within these centres. Other charities that may offer adequate funding support to cover 2 to 3 years include the British Skin Foundation, DebRA, and the National Eczema Society. Some hospitals have trust funds, which can cover all or part of a period of PhD.

If you apply for funding for research, it is very likely that you will be called to an interview. The interview is more like an oral examination. Questions will range around the subject area as well as the planned approach to research, the potential difficulties and the potential outcomes. You will need to work towards it as if you had written the application completely by yourself and knew a lot about the subject.

If you are thinking seriously about applying for a period of full-time research, then you must also discuss this with your educational supervisor and with the regional training committee. You would need to apply for out-of-programme research period (OOPR)

# r MD/PhD research

and this will need to be approved by the deanery before you take time out of a training programme. The period of time out of program can contribute towards training time to a variable degree.

The only other important piece

of advice is to start early if you are seriously considering a 3-year period of research. It does take time to develop a research plan and to obtain the funding. However, there is a wealth of areas just waiting for new investigators and the

pluses from achieving a research aim are great and far outweigh the possible negatives of the application process.

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***Table 1***

| Sources of short-term funding  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Source of support              | How to apply   |
| <b>Academic post</b>           | FY or ST application process via GMC/PMETB<br>Annual applications in autumn.<br>Foundation:<br><a href="http://www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk">www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk</a><br>Academic clinical fellowship:<br><a href="http://www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk">www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk</a> |
| <b>Hospital Trust fund</b>     | Usually annual application process; contact own hospital   |
| <b>Cancer Research UK</b>      | Research Bursary.<br>Applications in January and August<br><a href="http://www.cancerresearchuk.org.uk">www.cancerresearchuk.org.uk</a>  |
| <b>British Skin Foundation</b> | BSF Fellowship.<br>Applications in August<br><a href="http://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk">www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk</a>  |
| <b>Other charities</b>         | Variable   |

***Table 2***

| Sources of funding for MD or PhD i.e. 3 year's salary plus running expenses |   |
|---|---|
| Source of funding   | What and when   |
| <b>MRC</b>  | Clinical Research Training Fellowship<br>Applications January & September<br><a href="http://www.mrc.ac.uk">www.mrc.ac.uk</a>   |
| <b>BSF</b>  | Dual funded Clinical Research Training Fellowship<br>BSF/MRC/BAD. Applications annually.<br><a href="http://www.mrc.ac.uk">www.mrc.ac.uk</a>                          |
| <b>Wellcome Trust</b>   | Research Training Fellowships<br>Applications January, June & September<br><a href="http://www.wellcome.ac.uk">www.wellcome.ac.uk</a>                                 |
| <b>Cancer Research UK</b>   | Clinical Research Training Fellowships within CRUK Cancer centres and CRUK Institutes<br><a href="http://www.cancerresearchuk.org.uk">www.cancerresearchuk.org.uk</a> |
| <b>Other charities</b>  | e.g. DebRA, National Eczema Society<br>These charities may not donate annual support, so check websites   |