Frequently Asked Questions about Family Medicine Research for Medical Students and Residents

What is family medicine research?

Family medicine research is research done by family physicians about the patients and communities that they serve. This research covers the entire spectrum of clinical problems as well as the organization and delivery of primary care. Key questions include:

- Studying the natural history of common problems and major diseases.
- Understanding how patients, families, communities, and systems deal with health and illness.
- Improving doctor-patient communication, decision making, and partnership.
- Testing systems to improve patient satisfaction, safety, and outcomes.

Family medicine research uses a combination of methods from the biomedical, health services, public health, and social sciences and is often characterized by teamwork that is interdisciplinary, patient centered, and community based.

Why should family physicians do research?

Research is a critical component to the continued growth and development of the field of family medicine. Most patient care occurs in the office of primary care physicians, but most research is done in academic medical centers. The community-based office is an ideal laboratory for the study of patients and their problems.

How do family physicians use research?

Some family physicians do research; all use research. In everyday patient care, family physicians evaluate, select, recommend, and explain new information and clinical interventions.

What role can the family physician play in doing research?

There are many opportunities for family physicians to contribute to the research enterprise, from simply collecting data for a large study to being the primary investigator of a National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded project. Family physicians are needed at every level. Every family physician should participate in the essential process of identifying and answering questions that change practice and improve the health of our patients.

How do I start doing research?

Organizations such as the North American Primary Care Research Group (NAPCRG), the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine (STFM), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) provide opportunities for students, residents, and practicing family physicians to get involved in research. Many Departments of Family Medicine in medical schools have student research programs, and all family practice residency programs include involvement in research. Start with a limited role that uses your current knowledge and matches your clinical interests. You can learn research methods, data analysis, writing, and presenting skills as you choose to expand your responsibilities. Most importantly, find a faculty mentor who can guide your interests and support your work.

How can NAPCRG help me?

NAPCRG is the premier organization devoted to family medicine and primary care research. It is also a nurturing environment that welcomes and supports new researchers at all stages of their careers. The NAPCRG annual meeting is the place to present your research, build skills through workshops, meet colleagues, and share in building the future of family medicine.

Resources

www.napcrg.org – North American Primary Care Research Group
www.stfm.org – Society of Teachers of Family Medicine
www.annfammed.org – *Annals of Family Medicine*
www.aafp.org/x3201.xml – American Academy of Family Physician's National Research Network
www.aafp.org/x19544.xml – Federation of Practice Based Research Networks