

# A multi-disciplinary focus for primary care research

## Primary Care Research Forum 2004

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This year the RNZCGP supported a primary care research forum on the day preceding the RNZCGP Conference. The objectives of the forum were:

- To provide an opportunity to look at the way different disciplines are looking at primary health care;
- To provide an opportunity for networking between researchers from different disciplines with an interest in primary care research; and
- To provide an opportunity for primary health care practitioners to look at the range of research taking place in primary care.

The research forum was attended by 103 researchers, clinicians, managers and planners (Table 1). The multi-disciplinary background of those who attended the research forum highlighted the diversity of researchers working in primary care. Feedback from those who attended confirmed the value of the opportunity to network, and to consider different perspectives and methodologies.

The first part of the day consisted of a plenary session with speakers from different disciplinary backgrounds presenting perspectives on primary care research. Tony Dowell got the day off to a great start with his descriptions of the first randomised controlled trial, outlined in the Book of Daniel, and demonstrating the 'benefits of a diet of pulses on the countenance of participants'. Jan Pearson (New Zealand Royal Plunket Society) and Robin Kearns (University of Auckland) followed with superb presentations outlining the diverse localities within which primary health care can be delivered. Jan drew on her work about school clinics and Robin

on his experiences as a medical geographer in Northland. Bruce Arroll followed with examples of 'n of 1' trials which managed to convince the audience of the merits of at least some quantitative methodologies. Margaret Southwick (Whitireia Community Polytechnic) provided a thought provoking discussion on the importance of community in primary care research. A brief representation of the Ministry of Health's perspective on primary care research by Stephen Lungley was followed by an interesting discussion.

The second part of the day consisted of concurrent sessions. Presentations were grouped within the concurrent sessions to reflect a theme or methodology. Themes included randomised controlled trials, experiences of primary care research, methods and methodologies, the relative merits of surveys and routinely collected data, defining primary care through research and examples of collaboration and partnership in research. The request that speakers focus on discussion of methods and

methodologies rather than outcomes provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of speakers.

Overall, it seemed the objectives of the research forum were met. The forum was well received by those attending and the evaluation reflected general affirmation of the value of the forum and the acceptability of making the forum an annual event (Table 2). Feedback from participants suggested most found the plenary session valuable and in particular appreciated the multidisciplinary content and the opportunity for discussion. Comments included:

*'Continue to encourage diversity of professional disciplines attendance.'*

*'Multidisciplinary presentation a bonus.'*

*'Interdisciplinary input vital to reflect clinical realities in primary care settings. Great balance between academic, clinical and political elements of service development and delivery.'*

*'I found the forum to be an excellent opportunity as a newcomer to get an overview of the kinds of research*

Table 1. Profile of Attendees

Organisation	Number	%
Universities/Polytechnics	39	38
Primary Health Organisations/Health Trusts/Providers	23	22
Other health organisations	6	6
International visitors	8	8
Ministries	3	3
DHBs	7	7
RNZCGP	4	4
GPEP	9	9
Unknown	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	

being done locally in the primary care field, and to make some contacts. I really enjoyed the reflective focus on different methodological approaches etc., as well as learning about the results of individual studies.'

Participants also suggested ways in which the forum could be improved in the future. Suggestions included: a focus on kaupapa Maori research;

*'I think the keynote speakers were interesting and elicited some interesting discussions. However, a big omission was the Maori perspective at this session. I think it should certainly be a central part of the keynote session at any future research forum and was*

*very surprised that this had not been considered at the first one.'*

*...longer time for discussion;*

*'Needed longer for the panel discussion time and questions. It was potentially a really good forum for important discussion of key issues in PC research.'*

*...and more research by clinicians.*

*'I enjoyed the forum immensely and believe it would be good to encourage more nurses to present so perhaps some thought could be given to advertising the event in nursing publications.'*

*'A bit academic for me! Maybe a stronger emphasis on "coal-face" research by some GPs doing some?'*

Most wanted to have some concurrent sessions and appreciated the emphasis on the presentation of methodologies and methods rather than just focusing on findings. In order to achieve adequate discussion about methods sufficient time needs to be allowed for each presenter. We allocated 25 minutes, including 10 minutes for discussion and this time allocation seems to have been appropriate.

*'Excellent. It was great that speakers had the opportunity (i.e. enough time) to go into useful depth. If you get too many people wanting to present, go with those who share methodological insights and stay away from bureaucrats and those doing pure evaluations of unimportant projects run by incompetents. Also don't reduce the amount of time for presenters. This is the first useful conference I've been to for years.'*

*'I really enjoyed the supportive, open environment and the willingness to listen to different and diverse ideas – well done and thanks.'*

Merging the primary care research forum with the RNZCGP Conference facilitated attendance by those coming to the RNZCGP Conference. The disadvantage being that College Faculty delegates, who had meetings on that day, were unable to attend.

*'Would not have attended if I hadn't been going to the GP conference so it was good to have at the beginning.'*

We hope that the RNZCGP will continue to support the research forum. The multidisciplinary backgrounds of attenders, the presence of international visitors and the fact that many came from centres outside of Wellington suggest that the forum would be supported if held in other parts of the country. Primary care research has emerged as a discipline in New Zealand. General practice is an integral part of that discipline. Combining the research forum with the RNZCGP conference has the advantage of facilitating the research component of the RNZCGP Conference, and providing networking opportunities between a key part of the primary care workforce and the researchers working in primary care.

Table 2. Evaluation

Evaluation Aspect	Number	%
How worthwhile was the research forum overall?		
1. Very worthwhile	36	63
2. ↓	14	25
3. ↓	4	7
4. ↓	2	4
5. Not at all worthwhile	1	2
Overall, how worthwhile have you personally found the keynote session(s) to be:		
1. Very worthwhile	34	60
2. ↓	17	30
3. ↓	2	4
4. ↓	3	5
5. Not at all worthwhile	0	0
Not answered	1	
Preference for:		
Concurrent sessions	40	70
No concurrent sessions	8	14
Other	6	11
Not answered	3	5
Do you feel the research forum should be held:		
Every year	48	84
Every two years	9	16
Other	0	0
How long should the research forum be:		
1 day	50	88
2 days	6	11
Other	1	2
Did you think the registration fee was:		
Appropriate	55	97
Too expensive	0	0
Other	1	2
Not answered	1	2
Total evaluations received:	57	61 *

\* Excluding invited speakers and committee