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PBRNs - present and future of general practice research

Anna Dania(1), J Martikainen(2), P Mäntyselkä(1)

(1) School of Medicine, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland.

(2) School of Pharmacy, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland

Corresponding author: Dr Anna Dania, University of Eastern Finland, General Practice, Kuopio, Finland. E-mail: annadan@uef.fi

Background and Aim: The Practice-Based Research Networks (PBRNs) are developed as coalitions of primary care (PC) practices usually affiliated with academic or professional organizations or health research institutes, sharing the commitment to improve the quality of health care conducting research. The PBRNs proliferation internationally in the last 3 decades is connected with a gradual change of their forms and their endeavours. This narrative review aims to examine the evolution of PBRNs in the PC settings regarding forms and endeavours the last two decades and to illustrate the underlying elements of that evolution in various countries.

Methods: The literature for this review was obtained by search conducted for the period January 1995 to October 2015. Primary resources were the databases: MEDLINE (PubMed), Embase, Scopus and Wiley. Secondary resources were used too. The studies were scrutinized according to the pre-set inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Results: 33 studies were found to fulfil the set inclusion and exclusion criteria. The PBRNs might be categorized into local PBRNs, networks of PBRNs, national PBRNs, and e-PBRNs. They vary regarding their setting-up processes missions and aims, the size, the community involvement, the use of EPRs (or EHRs), and the research focuses. Even though most of them report similar challenges which revolve around the clinicians' involvement and commitment, data issues, ethical and patients safety issues, study designs, structure and governance, and funding, they produce an increasing volume of research studies and research data which affects positively the PC quality.

Conclusions: The PBRNs independently from size, structure and locality may conduct a broad spectrum of research studies. Their expansion and success may be attributed to their unique strength to conduct responding to real life problems transferring the knowledge from research to practice effectively and their flexibility to reform in order to respond to more complicated needs with increased efficiency.