

UKDCTN SpR Fellowship Experiences Dr Jonathan Batchelor



I was lucky enough to be awarded a UKDCTN SpR Fellowship for a two year period starting in October 2008. Since starting the fellowship, I have been involved in a number of activities which I have enjoyed immensely.

One of the UKDCTN's future aims is to produce a high-quality trial (possibly a randomised controlled trial) in patients with vitiligo. An essential step before deciding on a potential trial is to highlight which treatments for vitiligo have already been assessed by good RCTs and which have not. Systematic reviews offer the best summary of the RCTs in the current literature and Cochrane Systematic reviews are acknowledged to be the most thorough of these reviews. I have therefore joined a group of reviewers including clinicians, a statistician, a methodologist and headed up by Maxine Whitton, healthcare consumer and active UKDCTN member, and we have embarked on updating a Cochrane review on interventions for vitiligo. A number of people warned me that systematic reviews are a big undertaking, and this is certainly true! But it is great to work with all these people and to learn about the process of systematic reviews. The UKDCTN have provided support for me to attend a Cochrane Systematic Review Course to develop an understanding of the review process and we are already working on the review protocol.

Working on a systematic review requires good critical appraisal skills and John Ingram, the other SpR fellow, and I have been able to develop these during several thoroughly enjoyable sessions with Prof Hywel Williams. The BEES course provided us both with a good grounding in critical appraisal and it is very satisfying to be able to put these skills into practice.

We had an excellent 3-day visit to the UKDCTN headquarters in April. The UKDCTN staff made us very welcome and introduced us to the Network's many trials, both current and future, and we had a very informative session on the Skin Disorders Specialist Library. We also joined dermatology colleagues at their research club at QMC Hospital and had a great night out with the UKDCTN staff.

Attending the UKDCTN Steering Group meetings has offered a fascinating insight into how a research idea evolves into a fully-blown trial. I have enjoyed contributing to discussions on the trials and vignettes and can see how complicated a process this can be. I may be a little less harsh in my critical appraisal of RCTs now that I know how much effort it takes to plan them, let alone carry them out!

Thank you to the UKDCTN for making all these experiences possible. I am looking forward to the remaining period of the fellowship being involved in the Network's activities in the future. The fellowship offers an excellent opportunity to get involved in clinical dermatology research and I would thoroughly recommend it to other dermatology trainees.