York Trials Unit (YTU): early history

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Health care research: funders in late 1980s

- **Department of Health (DH)** focused on research to inform policy; for example they funded clustered randomised trial of clinical guidelines in 60 general practices in North of England, designed to improve quality of primary medical care.

- **Medical Research Council (MRC)** focused on biomedical research, but established Health Services Research Board to fund health care research, generally more rigorous than that funded by DH, notably through randomised trials of non-drugs.

- **Wellcome Trust** sought to complement these DH & MRC programmes, notably by funding Clinical Research Chairs & Fellowships to conduct clinically oriented health care research.
House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Research 1990

- Dismayed that NHS had funded little research since 1948.
- Disappointed that *Service Increment For Teaching & Research* (SIFT R) was really a subsidy to teaching hospitals, nominally to facilitate research, but often without protocols!
- Proposed new structure for *NHS Research & Development* (R&D) in England, led by national & regional Directors of R&D.
- Recommended new funding for *peer-reviewed* research, both national (e.g. for health technology assessment) & regional.
- Suggested redirecting the R component of SIFT R, notably to cover the cost of technologies & treatments to be evaluated.
University of York: Dept of Health Sciences & Clinical Evaluation (DHSCE)

- UY established DHSCE in Alcuin College in 1994, not least to provide academic base for the new NHS R&D programme.
- In 1995 DHSCE created Graduate School of Health Sciences to train clinicians & scientists to undertake health services R&D.
- DHSCE soon partnered Centre for Health Economics (CHE) & NHS Centre for Reviews & Dissemination (CRD), e.g. in RAE 96.
- In 1996 DHSCE occupied residential block converted to provide space for teaching, PCs, academics, & York Trials Unit (YTU).
- In 1997 DHSCE began BSc in Health Sciences, also designed to support NHS R&D.
• NHS should provide **effective health care** that achieves health gain by improving health & welfare of patients.
• Evidence of effectiveness needs rigorous evaluation, ideally through multi-centre randomised trials (preferably run by YTU).
• NHS should purchase **cost-effective health care** that focuses on ‘best buys’ by comparing estimated health gain & cost.
• Evidence of cost-effectiveness also needs rigorous evaluation (preferably by partnership including CHE & YTU).
• NHS should provide **equitable health care** based on full range of evidence including intangible effects & local circumstances.
• Synthesis of effectiveness, cost-effectiveness & equity needs “centre to commission & coordinate overviews & clinical guidelines” (preferably in partnership with CRD).

NHS Research & Development: subsequent progress

- In 1999, stimulated by report from 2nd House of Lords Select Committee, DH created **National Institute for Clinical Excellence** (NICE) to guide NHS use of health technologies & clinical practice (since extended to public health & social care).

- In 2006 DH established **National Institute for Health Research** (NIHR) to enhance NHS R&D, especially by enhancing facilities (notably **clinical trials units**), training, & collaboration with industry, charities, patients & the public.

- In 2016 the independent US RAND Corporation judged that NIHR had "transformed R&D for the NHS & its patients."
York Trials Unit: early progress

• *UK Backpain Exercise And Manipulation (UK BEAM) trial*, funded by MRC, showed that spinal manipulation significantly improved patient outcomes in low back pain over 12 months.

  UK BEAM trial team. *BMJ* 2004a & b; 329: 1377-81 & 1381-5.

• *UK Alcohol Treatment Trial (UKATT)*, also funded by MRC, showed that psychotherapy (viz Motivational Enhancement Therapy & Social Behavioural Network Therapy) improved patient outcomes for alcohol problems over 12 months.

  UKATT research team. *BMJ* 2005a & b; 331: 541-4 & 544-7.

• Thus YTU contributed to better scores in successive Research Assessment Exercises (RAEs) in 1996, 2001 & 2008.
York Trials Unit: early achievements

- YTU enhanced successive Research Assessments & continues to do so through growing ‘impact’.
- YTU increased collaboration with several medical schools across UK, & thus University funding.
- YTU stimulated recruitment to Graduate School of Health Sciences, & teaching therein.
- Clinical Trials Units in Newcastle, Aberdeen, Cardiff, Bangor & Swansea have had similar achievements.