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What is Collaborative Research?

Scenario

Dr Desmond from Institute of Mental Health (IMH) intends to collaborate with Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to conduct a mental health well-being research study on NTU university students. However, he was unsure of how to collaborate with NTU researchers and sought his Clinical Research Coordinator (CRC) advice. His CRC advised on the following:

What is Collaborative Research?

Collaborative Research is a partnership between two or more parties working together in a research project. It may involve researchers who work within the same discipline, either within an institution or in different institutions. Multidisciplinary research is another form of collaborative research that involves researchers working across disciplines, either within an institution or in different institutions.

Factors that contribute to collaborative research:

- Researchers with the same common research area of interest.
- Researchers of different backgrounds and perspective collaborating to achieve or establish the same research goals.
- The research focus area like the recruitment criteria.
- Availability of the resources needed for the research area like laboratory facilities.
- Funding sources e.g. National Medical Research Council (NMRC) has developed a comprehensive and transparent set of grant schemes to grow and support the research environment in Singapore with the revamped grant framework to engage all levels of expertise of clinical investigators and researchers by ensuring adequate opportunities for research support and career development.
- Advancement of new telecommunications technologies e.g. web-based technologies allow researchers to input and manipulate data in shared databases with ease. Web-based telecommunications systems also allow people from across the world to communicate by simulating face- to-face meetings.

Some Potential Problems with Collaborative Research:

- Complex logistics which could lead to communication breakdown.
- Conflicts of interest in the study roles and responsibilities.
- Different goals and priorities on the research project.
- Difference in working styles among investigators.
- Difference in research design across and within disciplines (e.g. Different research disciplines may have varied approaches in work habits.)
- Differences between academic and industrial research with respect to sharing of data and results

How to enhance collaboration?

- Manage access to research materials
  - Communication is an essential aspect of collaboration.
  - Discuss in advance who will do what in a project while understanding that the research may evolve.
  - Team alignment toward a common goal. Setting clear goals can help teams to understand their roles and deliverables.
  - Build a trusting relationships with your collaborators.
- Establish agreements for each collaboration (e.g. material transfer agreements) and comply with multi-institutional agreements
- A policy for managing conflicts of interest that may potentially arise in collaborative research must be readily available in the institutions. Researchers must disclose as soon as possible any actual, apparent or perceived conflict of interest to any aspect of the projects when establishing research collaboration.

Reference:

1. Responsible Conduct of Research Manual, version 1.1

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