

Tips for Successful Research Collaboration

Richard D. Stevenson, MD
Professor of Pediatrics
University of Virginia
Principal Investigator, North American
Growth in Cerebral Palsy Project



Introduction



- Research is difficult
 - *Make it count!*
- Clinical research is *really* difficult
- Clinical research in today's economic climate is *really, really* difficult
- Collaboration is the key to success



Collaboration in Clinical Research

- Collaboration with children and families
 - *study something worthwhile*
- Collaboration with colleagues
 - *do it well*
- Collaboration with funding agencies
 - *make it happen*



Collaboration with Patients and Families



- Helps establish a research plan around issues that matter to patients/families
 - Addresses the question “so what?”
- Fosters long-term relationship between investigators and patients/families
- Natural extension of the concepts of family-centered care



Development of NAGCPP



- Multiple collaborations and pilot studies
- NAGCPP began with a consensus conference in 1996
- Participants 'hammered out' the outline of a plan for the study of growth in children with cerebral palsy
- Made decisions about subjects, design, methods, priorities, structure



Collaboration with Colleagues



- Carves out time for research
- Develops and sharpens ideas
- Helps to establish the scope of research
- Develops expertise to carry out the research
- Develops methodology
- Establishes mentoring relationships
- Lends strength to grant applications



Collaboration with Colleagues

- Need a 'culture' that supports collaboration
- Key elements:
 - TRUST in one another
 - RESPECT for others' ideas
 - OPENNESS to looking at 'old' problems in new ways
 - COMFORT to subsume one's role to a larger unit of activity



Collaboration with Funding Agencies

- Find out all possible alternatives
- Start small and take all the time needed
- Find the right match
- Be responsible with funds
- Communicate results back to funding agencies
- Be persistent ("never give up")



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

1. **Study something worthwhile!**

That means taking as much time as possible to ask an EXCELLENT question

This is harder than it seems, but repays huge dividends!



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

1. Study something worthwhile

2. **Do your homework**

About the issues, about what is and is not known, about what 'they' say are the next steps in unraveling the mysteries



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

1. Study something worthwhile

2. Do your homework

3. **Get yourself in shape (trained)**

Research is not a Saturday afternoon pastime when it is raining! It requires specific skills and discipline



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

1. Study something worthwhile

2. Do your homework

3. Get yourself in shape (trained)

4. **Use the best design available**

Don't be cowed by feasibility issues at the outset...



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

1. Study something worthwhile
2. Do your homework
3. Get yourself in shape (trained)
4. Use the best design

5. Get the best tools

Again – don't worry (yet) about feasibility – measure the 'right' things



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

6. Find and meet mentors

Most people in our field are more than happy to share their experience and to support others' development...just ask (politely – and NOT AT THE LAST MINUTE)



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

6. Find and meet mentors

7. Set a timetable

But don't let it dominate your thinking and planning – more time up front is a better investment than reworking incomplete grant applications



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

6. Find and meet mentors

7. Set a timetable

8. Choose collaborators with complementary skills

To enrich the program and bring new perspectives to 'old' issues



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

6. Find and meet mentors
7. Set a timetable
8. Choose collaborators with complementary skills
9. **Communicate**

*This point cannot be overstated!
Too much is better than too little*



Successful Collaboration: Top Ten List

10. Choose only collaborators you like to work with!

Remember Element #1 – Trust, Respect, Openness, Comfort. Life is too short for battles with people you wouldn't drink a beer with!



Collaboration in Clinical Research: Summary and Conclusions

- Collaboration with children and families helps establish research that matters
- Collaboration with colleagues establishes a research plan that is methodologically sound and feasible
- Collaboration with funding agencies paves the way for completion of fruitful research



**Nothing in the world can take
The place of Persistence.
Talent will not; Nothing is more
Common than unsuccessful
Men with Talent; Genius will not;
Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education alone will not;
The world is full
Of educated derelicts.
Persistence and Determination
Alone are omnipotent.**

-Calvin Coolidge



Acknowledgments



- Richard D. Stevenson
- Mark Conaway
- Richard C. Henderson
- Gordon Worley
- Greg Liptak
- Virginia A. Stallings
- W. Cameron Chumlea
- Ellen Fung
- Peter Rosenbaum
- Maureen O'Donnell
- Lisa Samson-Fang
- Christine Houlihan
- Vivienne Spauls
- Robert Lark
- Linda Deeds
- Alan Rogol
- Robert Blizzard
- Jim Roemmich
- Ann Johanson
- Murray Goldstein
- Sharon Hostler
- James Blackman

