

## Awareness of clinical pharmacologists as practising clinicians amongst healthcare professionals, students and the public

C. J. Threapleton, J. T. Larvin, H. Fok, D. Burrage, D. Lonsdale, E. Baker. Clinical Pharmacology, St George's, University of London, London, United Kingdom.

**Introduction:** Clinical pharmacology is a dynamic medical specialty essential for UK healthcare (1). However confusion around the role of clinical pharmacologists in the NHS is perceived to affect recruitment to the specialty (2) and limit its clinical contribution. The aim of this survey was to investigate awareness of the clinical role of clinical pharmacologists amongst healthcare professionals, students and the public.

**Method:** October 2017 was the inaugural 'Clinical Pharmacology Month' conceived by the British Pharmacological Society, during which a series of events to raise the profile of clinical pharmacology was held. A questionnaire was developed to determine whether participants had heard of clinical pharmacology, could identify the setting where clinical pharmacologists worked, and were able to identify the main roles of a clinical pharmacologist. Questionnaires were administered at a public engagement stall in the hospital foyer and at a public debate on the affordability of medicines.

**Results:** Questionnaires were completed anonymously by 101 participants, of whom 33 (34%) identified as healthcare professionals, 26 (27%) as healthcare students and 39 (40%) as members of the public. Seventy-four (77%) of 96 participants who answered the question claimed to have heard of clinical pharmacology, including 29 (91%) healthcare professionals, 24 (96%) healthcare students and 21 (57%) public. Respondents thought that clinical pharmacologists worked in medical practice in hospitals (41 (44%)) but also commonly identified university research laboratories (22 (24%)) and pharmaceutical companies (11 (12%)) as the main place of work. Table 1 compares the proportion of respondents claiming to be aware or unaware of clinical pharmacology who attributed different roles to clinical pharmacologists. Similar numbers of participants in each group erroneously thought that clinical pharmacologists were involved in drug administration (typically a nursing role) or dispensing (usually done by pharmacists). Even in the 'aware' group, respondents were more likely to state clinical pharmacologists did laboratory or animal research than see patients.

**Conclusions:** Although 77% of respondents claimed to have heard of clinical pharmacology, the role of clinical pharmacologists is incompletely understood. This study highlights an important misconception that clinical pharmacology does not involve patient contact. This misunderstanding may deter potential trainees from applying to the specialty or healthcare professionals or patients from utilising the clinical expertise of clinical pharmacologists. Any plan to promote the specialty should include emphasis on its clinical value to the NHS.

### References:

1. BPS Guide to Clinical Pharmacology Month, <https://www.bps.ac.uk/october2>.
2. BPS Clinical Pharmacology Month - get involved, <https://www.bps.ac.uk/publishing/our-other-publications/pharmacology-matters-blog/june-2017/clinical-pharmacology-month-%E2%80%93-get-involved>

Table 1. Identifying roles of a clinical pharmacologist

	Aware (n=74)	Not aware (n=22)	
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	p value
<b>Clinical:</b>			
Administer drugs to patients	18 (25%)	3 (14%)	0.275
Dispense drugs to patients	26 (35%)	4 (18%)	0.132
Run clinics	28 (38%)	7 (32%)	0.607
See patients	33 (45%)	1 (5%)	0.001
<b>Teaching:</b>			

Teach	38 (51%)	6 (27%)	0.047
<b>Research:</b>			
Discover drugs	44 (60%)	8 (36%)	0.056
Do animal studies	34 (46%)	3 (14%)	0.006
Do human studies	51 (69%)	4 (18%)	0.000
Do laboratory research	50 (68%)	13 (59%)	0.462
<b>Policy:</b>			
Give advice to government	39 (53%)	5 (23%)	0.013
Write guidelines	45 (61%)	4 (18%)	0.000
<b>Commercial:</b>			
Run retail pharmacies	16 (22%)	1 (5%)	0.065
Work for drug companies	44 (60%)	7 (32%)	0.019