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# BOASTiC

*"Making Knowledge Stick"*

The 9th annual Bristol Oxford Surgical Trials Course (BOASTiC) was held in Bristol this year at Engineer's House, University of Bristol. The course is primarily aimed at surgical trainees who are interested in clinical research, with an emphasis on design and conduct of randomised control trials. Expert specialists from Bristol, Oxford, and Aberdeen descended in Bristol, each group bringing their own ideas and expertise on surgical trials, but most importantly bringing a sense of good vibes and collaboration. BOASTiC was attended by surgical trainees from a wide variety of specialities and locations across the UK and Ireland.

The course ran over three days in September. A variety of teaching methods were utilised to maintain audience engagement and participation such as lectures, tutorials and small group forums. An exciting background to the three days of intense learning around randomised trials was that each group (with 5-6 members) was allocated to design a trial, working up to a dragon's den pitch at the end of the three days.

## Day 1

On arrival at Engineer's House there was a delicious array of breakfast items, including fresh pastries and egg sandwiches, coffee, tea, and orange juice. We were warmly met on Day 1 by Professor Blazeby, who set the scene for the course and gave expert insight into the role of randomised trials in advancing evidence-based medicine. Candidates learnt the essentials of trial design via a series of presentations that covered research question design (Professor David Beard), trial design (Professor Jonathan Cook), and outcomes in RCTs (Professor Marion Campbell). This was supplemented by expert talks including the experience of being a new PI (Miss Deena Harji) and designing a RCT protocol (associate Professor Natalie Blencowe). We finished the day by presenting our initial ideas for our group projects to the wider group. Finally, we headed for the course dinner at Zizzi's, just down the road from Engineer's House.

On day 2 we heard from associate Professor Kerry Avery of the Bristol Centre for Surgical Research about pilot and feasibility studies. She clearly explained the indications for such studies, the differences and similarities, and the consequences that can occur when they are not undertaken.

Before tea, Prof. Cook gave us an overview of alternative trial designs and then we had two talks that covered recruitment and retention. Dr. Marcus Jepson covered strategies and tools we can use to optimise recruitment into trials. A particularly notable part of the day was a workshop where Prof Blazeby and Prof Beard delivered mock examples of good and poor trial recruitment methods, providing the course plenty of entertainment! The delegates also continued to work in groups to design their RCTs for presentation on the final day.

Day 3 finally arrived and we all had the feeling of excitement as we would be up against each other in the afternoon for the Dragon's Den. This proved to be the most exciting day of the course, with most of the time spent prepping presentations before the final dragon's den pitch. Essential talks that proved to be extremely useful were provided by Dr Lucy Culliford (The practicalities of how to run a clinical trial), Mr Richard Wilkin sharing his experience of how it is to be a new chief investigator and Prof Katie Gillies who talked to us about the importance of retention in RCTs. The Dragons (Prof Marion Campbell, Dr Lucy Culliford and Prof Angus McNair) provided great feedback for every trial.

Feedback from the course has once again been excellent with the delegates rating the quality of teaching excellent or very good. Below are some of the comments from the participants:

"I wouldn't have thought teaching about trial methodology could have been so interactive and fun!"

"Brilliant and well organised course with excellent tutors!"

Attending BOASTIC 2023 has broadened my research horizons and I would definitely recommend it to any trainee who is interested in surgery, clinical trials, or both.

Mr Georgios Karagiannidis – CT2 General Surgery