

International reflections on NAPCRG: celebrating 50 years of learning and connecting

Tim olde Hartman,¹ David N Blane ,² Elizabeth Sturgiss ,³
Pauline Boeckxstaens,⁴ Liesbeth Hunik¹

To cite: olde Hartman T, Blane DN, Sturgiss E, *et al.* International reflections on NAPCRG: celebrating 50 years of learning and connecting. *Fam Med Com Health* 2022;**10**:e001880. doi:10.1136/fmch-2022-001880

Health systems vary from country to country, but primary care researchers share a common goal to improve the care of patients and communities around the world through high-quality research and academic practice. North American Primary Care Research Group (NAPCRG) is an academic community that brings together researchers, educators, clinicians, patients and consumers to highlight the role that primary care plays in strong and effective healthcare systems.

NAPCRG has played a key role in fostering international collaboration and connection, nurturing early career and experienced researchers alike.¹ With the 50-year celebration of the organisation, we take time to reflect on what NAPCRG means to the international primary care research community.

MENTAL REFRESHMENT

As academic primary care researchers, we are always juggling different commitments—from working on research projects, writing grants to secure future funding, doing peer and grant review work, supervising research students, teaching, journal editing, administrative and leadership roles, as well as often working clinically—all while striving to maintain some semblance of work–life balance alongside caring commitments.²

Amidst this whirlwind of activity, the annual NAPCRG annual meeting can provide much-needed mental refreshment—an opportunity to put your ‘out of office’ email response on and reconnect with international colleagues.

I always leave NAPCRG inspired to continue my work; sometimes research can be slow moving and lonely; but NAPCRG always helps me connect with other researchers. (Early-mid career researcher)

An important contributor to the mental refreshment NAPCRG brings is ‘inspiration’. NAPCRG motivates and drives people by providing a sense of purpose, reminding us about our shared values and what gets us out of bed in the mornings.

NAPCRG is one of the few primary care conferences where I am inspired to think, discuss and hear about the true core values of primary care. (Mid-career researcher)

Time for reflection is much needed in today’s fast-paced world. NAPCRG allows us to take stock, reflect, remember the bigger picture and go again, perhaps even re-evaluating our competing demands and improving that work–life balance along the way.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Research is a team game and relationships are key to successful research. NAPCRG provides multiple opportunities for individuals and groups of researchers to extend and strengthen their networks, regardless of career stage or research experience.

For early career researchers, the opportunity to present a poster provides a welcoming opportunity to introduce yourself and your research to the NAPCRG community.³ Important in this regard is the dedicated time and attention given to poster sessions at the annual conference, which help to make connections with more experienced colleagues.

As an early career researcher, I was surprised about how easy it was to get in contact with a lot of highly experienced researchers. (Early career researcher)

Furthermore, the variety of sessions, oral presentations, workshops, forums and



© Author(s) (or their employer(s)) 2022. Re-use permitted under CC BY-NC. No commercial re-use. See rights and permissions. Published by BMJ.

¹Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Center, Department of Primary and Community Care, Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

²General Practice and Primary Care, School of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

³School of Primary and Allied Health Care, Monash University, Frankston, Victoria, Australia

⁴Ghent University, Gent, Belgium

Correspondence to

Dr Elizabeth Sturgiss;
liz.sturgiss@monash.edu

preconference workshops help primary care researchers to introduce themselves and their work to the NAPCRG community. Moreover, it provides ways to connect and build relationships with researchers from different backgrounds, working in diverse fields of primary care research and with different levels of experience. These opportunities can lead to research collaborations, for example, the Consensus Reporting Items for Studies in Primary Care project that was born from a NAPCRG collaboration.⁴ For many researchers, it feels like a supportive environment.

NAPCRG is a really supportive environment for early career researchers. (Mid-career researcher)

The conference provides a great mix of world-class plenaries, engaging workshops and excellent parallel and poster sessions (which are designed to be well attended and interactive). The international perspectives and opportunity to spend time with colleagues in a more relaxed atmosphere are also major advantages. (Mid-career researcher)

LEARNING COMMUNITY

NAPCRG is described as a nurturing environment for primary care researchers in many ways. At its core, NAPCRG embraces the values of primary care. Throughout the conference, participants are encouraged to reflect about the underlying meaning of their passion and interest for primary care. This implicitly creates a learning community based on the core values of primary care and how they are fundamental to the research we perform.

The nurturing of young primary care researchers is at the core of NAPCRG and that's why I love coming to the meetings. (Mid-career researcher)

More explicitly, participants learn about how to conduct primary care research. NAPCRG specifically highlights the importance of transdisciplinary research as it engages clinician researchers, health services researchers, patients and policy makers to learn together and build on each other's thoughts, insights, (clinical) strategies, underlying theoretical concepts and research methods. By bringing these different stakeholders together, everyone is supported to engage in research that matters to our patients and communities.⁵

showcases high quality primary care methods. (Mid-career researcher)

excellent inter-disciplinary methodology across the very varied range of important clinical, health services research, and public health issues that only primary care can sensibly address, with a clear focus on what matters to our patients. (Senior researcher)

NAPCRG specifically encourages early career researchers and fosters mentorship throughout the conference. The NAPCRG community adopts an overall atmosphere of encouraging early career researchers,

supporting more established researchers to send their students to NAPCRG early in their career.

As an early career researcher, I have greatly appreciated the built-in mentorship embedded in NAPCRG. In particular, the 'Secrets of My Success' panels! (Early career researcher)

OPENING UP INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

At its inception, NAPCRG had a clear focus on North America, and the majority of today's annual meeting participants are from the USA and Canada. However, there is a growing contingent of delegates from across the globe including Europe, the UK and Australasia. The annual meeting is a melting pot of ideas influenced by all the different healthcare systems and settings. It is an opportunity to learn about different ways of seeing primary care and how it can best be implemented.

I really like the international mix and the very different perspectives - to see your own health system from others' eyes. (Senior researcher)

In recent years, NAPCRG has become increasingly globally oriented and the organisation is investing in supporting researchers from around the world by offering scholarships through other academic organisations, including the Australasian Association for Academic Primary Care, the Dutch College of General Practice and the Society for Academic Primary Care in the UK. Anyone who attends the annual meeting will be welcomed and encouraged to share their experiences of primary care in their home country. It is clear that we can all learn from one another.

PROMOTING PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH CAPACITY BUILDING

For years, primary care research leaders have proposed to bridge the gap between research and clinical practice. In this regard, strengthening the position of the clinician-researcher with appropriate research training is key. NAPCRG has been able to contribute strongly to this development by initiating the Grant Generating Project, in which family physicians, as part of their development and training, can learn to write successful research grants, and the Building Research Capacity programme, which seeks to build and sustain research and scholarship capacity in family medicine departments and residency programmes. But most of all, the annual conference of NAPCRG, including a mentorship programme, is built for promoting primary care research capacity building.

the mix of really experienced researchers who strongly encourage young researchers. (Senior researcher)

NAPCRG has been able to respond to my needs at all stages of my research career. (Mid-career researcher)

Primary care takes place in a complex and evolving context, and family physicians work more and more in

primary care teams. These primary care teams are multi-disciplinary groups of health and social care professionals who work together to deliver local, integrated, accessible, person-centred health and social services in accordance with the core values of primary care. Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration based on the foundation of primary care is at the core of NAPCRG's identity.

NAPCRG keeps connecting researchers with different backgrounds and with different levels of research experience. (Early career researcher)

I love working with the other community clinicians at NAPCRG and keeping the idea of the clinician researcher moving forward. Senior researcher)

NAPCRG is the place where I become inspired to think, discuss and learn about the true core values of primary care and how to connect that with my own research. (Mid-career researcher)

NEXT 50 YEARS

It is an exciting time for the NAPCRG family to reflect on the past and look towards where we want the organisation to grow. We look forward to the ongoing global vision that NAPCRG has for bringing together primary care researchers from every part of the globe. We recognise the barriers faced by many researchers to travel to a North American annual meeting and hope that the NAPCRG community can carry on some of the asynchronous opportunities that were spurred on by the pandemic.

Contributors ToH, DB, PB, LH and ES contributed equally to the writing of the draft of the manuscript and approved the final version. DB and ES provided the references.

Funding The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent for publication Not applicable.

Ethics approval Not applicable.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

Open access This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt, build upon this work non-commercially, and license their derivative works on different terms, provided the original work is properly cited, appropriate credit is given, any changes made indicated, and the use is non-commercial. See: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

ORCID iDs

David N Blane <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3872-3621>

Elizabeth Sturgiss <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4428-4060>

REFERENCES

- 1 The genesis of the North American primary care research Group. *The Annals of Family Medicine* 2003;1:247.
- 2 Cheraghi-Sohi S, Perry M, Wallace E, *et al*. A future in primary care research: a view from the middle. *Br J Gen Pract* 2018;68:440–1.
- 3 Welsh VK, Irving GJ, Blane DN. NAPCRG 2012: reflections from across the pond. *Br J Gen Pract* 2013;63:428–9.
- 4 Phillips WR, Sturgiss E, Hunik L, *et al*. Improving the reporting of primary care research: an international survey of researchers. *J Am Board Fam Med* 2021;34:12–21.
- 5 Mason K, Martinez-Guijosa A. NAPCRG patient and clinician engagement: from idea to program to board membership. *Ann Fam Med* 2022;20:386.