

## **Foreword to the**

### **Manual de iniciación a la investigación en pediatría de atención primaria**

It is with great pleasure that I accept the invitation to write the foreword to this practical introduction to clinical research in primary care paediatrics. This handbook is a collaborative venture by a group of paediatricians doing research under the aegis of SEPEAP, the Spanish society for ambulatory paediatrics. It is a pioneering work, the first of its kind that is aimed at ambulatory paediatric research in Spain, and it undeniably meets a growing demand.

Primary care paediatricians are devoted to the health care of children in their daily environment. This is their most important task, and it implies that they must be directly accessible and maintain a long-term and confidential relationship with their patients and their families. In this work, they will liaise with many other actors surrounding the child: GPs, medical teams in hospitals, paramedics, school staff, social workers, politicians. All this makes ours an exciting, but also a very demanding profession. And many might ask the question: why add clinical research to all this? At least four valid reasons can be given:

Clinical research is essential for us to be more efficient in caring for our patients. The specificity of ambulatory clinical research is that it takes the needs of our own daily practices as a starting point. It is different from, and complementary to, research as conducted in hospitals, because we, as primary carers, are aware of the child's condition as a long-term process that we follow in the child's own environment. Our research is pragmatic rather than experimental, and it will also lead to new insights that will help to improve our daily practices.

Clinical research means teamwork: those involved in it are no longer working in isolation, but form part of a wider research community, at the national level, such as the scientific committees of the national societies of primary care paediatricians, or internationally, in organizations like the ECPCP, which now has a research committee dedicated to ambulatory research at the European level. Recent developments like these illustrate the rising awareness that it is important for the ambulatory paediatrician to become an actor in clinical research, rather than simply a consumer of the results of research conducted by others. Being an actor in the scientific community also involves collaborating with scientists working in university hospitals, whose expertise will often be necessary: scientific knowledge is always the result of cross-pollination between several disciplines.

Clinical research also has a role to play in public health: it will lead to good clinical practice as required by public health agencies, and contribute to a more efficient use of government funding in the health sector.

Finally, by doing research and by disseminating the results in publications and presentations, the primary care paediatrician adds to the visibility, and to the credibility, of primary care paediatrics.

It is evident that there is a need for us to engage in ambulatory clinical research, but where and how does one start if one is still a novice in this new field? The present book sets out to answer these questions.

It is written by paediatricians and for paediatricians, viz. PCPs who aspire to engage in clinical research. It is organised in a user-friendly manner, and takes a practical, step-by-step approach, from the conception of the research to the publication of the results.

The book emphasizes the importance of a rigorous methodology. This is fundamental throughout the ten chapters that tackle various aspects of implementing a research project. The authors deal with basic principles of scientific investigation, like choosing the type of study that is the most adequate for the research question, or carrying out a bibliographical search and a critical analysis of the literature. Also among the 'basics' are elementary statistical methods, such as determining the number of subjects that need to be included in a study.

The book also looks at the legal and ethical implications of ambulatory clinical research, and at practical matters such as budgeting the project, organising group work, or the dissemination of the results.

In short, this book will be an invaluable guide to all those who want to engage in clinical research, and will help them to persevere and to avoid the stumbling blocks.

Stumbling blocks there may be, and perseverance will no doubt be necessary, but clinical research is not only challenging: it can also be very enjoyable, not in the least because it is a shared experience.

In the name of the ECPCP, I would like to congratulate the authors of this book, and to thank them for inviting other primary care paediatricians into the world of scientific investigation. I very much hope that their work will stimulate many to take the plunge and become involved in the individual and collective adventure that clinical research is.

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