

Grant Money Awarded By BOFAS

Has It Been Utilised Well & How Can Accountability Be Improved In Future?

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BACKGROUND: BOFAS awards grants to advance research in foot and ankle surgery. Between March 2015 & July 2018, it awarded between £1000 and £15000 to projects with a total outlay of 83,676.48 . However no audit practice has been taken to ensure the money has been spent and no system has been set up to ensure future awards are accountable.



Aims & Interventions

Audit grant awards

A questionnaire was generated to identify all important information that needed to be collected. Successful grant applicants were identified from an online database and principal investigators were asked in Q4 2018 to return the questionnaire. A three month window was left for replies assuming that information on finances may need to be sought from finance directorates, or information on presentation/publication may need to be sought from co-collaborators which may be a lengthy process. Reminder emails were then sent to either the principal investigator or named collaborators for each project where information was not received.

Identify methods of accountability

Specialist societies affiliated with the British Orthopaedic Association were identified through a web based search. Each society's website (excluding BOFAS) was examined to identify if each society awarded research grants and whether each society publically displayed information on grant awards. Representatives from AOUK and each specialist society were then contacted via email to independently ascertain whether research grants were awarded and what processes were in place for updates for each grant.

Introduce a system of accountability

The BOFAS Scientific Committee will be convening to decide how best to ensure future grants are accountable. Options include:

- Return of money if projects are not commenced within 6 months of the award of the grant.
- Progress reports to be submitted at regular time intervals: 2 months and 6 months after the first transfer of funds and subsequently at 6 monthly intervals until the project completion and publication.
- Progress reports to be either be verbally at the BOFAS AGM or visually presented as part of the posters section of the Annual Scientific meeting.
- Publication on the BOFAS website of currently active and completed projects (defined as those where publication or presentation of the final results has not been disseminated) using a traffic light system (where red indicates significant delays are present to achieving project completion in a reasonable time frame, yellow indicates the project in on target to be completed at the expected time and green means the project is ahead of schedule).

Outcomes

- Information was collected on 17 out of 19 grants awards.
- Of 17 with information, 10 projects were completed and 7 remain ongoing.
- Of 10 completed, 9 were presented and 4 published.
- £3715.01 in unspent funds was identified from three completed projects. £327 was returned to BOFAS as a result of this project. The remainder was expected to be used to extend their existing projects.
- Three societies identified their processes for research grant award accountability .
- Two societies stated research grant awards were no longer offered but industry funding used instead for clinical fellowships.

Conclusions and Future Work

How was grant money spent? Information was gathered for the first time on the majority of BOFAS awarded projects. Unused money was returned, and work completed as a result of these awards have been presented nationally and internationally, and published in peer reviewed journals.

How do other societies ensure accountability of grant awards? Multiple methods used by other organisations were identified and presented to the BOFAS Scientific Committee.

How will grants be accountable in future? The BOFAS Scientific committee is expected to ratify criteria for ensuring updates are received from the principal investigators of all grants. A decision will be made on the outcome of unused funds and whether funds should be returned if fail to progress in a timely manner.