

► The James Lind Alliance

Tackling treatment uncertainties together

In July 2007, RSM Council agreed that the Society should become an affiliate of the James Lind Alliance (JLA). What is this organisation; what is it attempting to achieve and how might Members of the RSM become involved?

Launched in December 2004 and co-convened by the James Lind Library, INVOLVE and the RSM, the JLA aims to bring patients and clinicians together to identify important uncertainties about the effects of treatments, and to prioritise future research on treatments. The JLA is funded jointly by the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health.

Researchers are not always ready to take account of patients' and clinicians' questions about the effects of treatment. As a result, there are examples of mismatches between what researchers are researching and what matters most to patients, both in terms of the types of treatment concerned and the measured outcomes of treatments.

The research agenda is driven principally by the needs of industry and the priorities of academia. Research on new indications for

existing drugs, for example, may only be of interest and attract funding if the drugs are still in patent. There was a substantial fall in the number of non-commercially funded trials between 1980 and 2002. Although increased funding through the National Institute for Health Research is beginning to address this trend, it has not yet been effectively reversed. For all these reasons, there is a pressing need for the development of new methods of patient and clinician involvement in research on treatments.

The James Lind Alliance seeks to facilitate working partnerships in which patients and clinicians (including all healthcare professionals) work collaboratively. In order to be able to prioritise future research, a systematic approach to the identification of therapeutic uncertainties is first needed: this is the objective of the Database of Uncertainties about the Effects of Treatments (DUETS – www.duets.nhs.uk), for which multi-source searches for unanswered questions about treatments are undertaken. These collections of uncertainties provide the information considered by working partnerships of patients and clinicians, which discuss and agree the most important priorities for future research.

The first JLA working partnership – in asthma – has recently been concluded; a second partnership, on urinary incontinence, was scheduled for completion by the end

of 2008; a Research of Patient Benefit bid in partnership with the Centre for Evidence Based Dermatology has been successful; and work on several other topics is currently being considered.

The James Lind Alliance has also commissioned studies exploring patients', clinicians' and researchers' priorities for research; and surveys of current UK practice in research priority setting. The JLA has co-convened two conferences (one in association with *The Lancet*, the other in association with the Association of Medical Research Charities) and published a number of articles to raise the profiles of these issues.

More than 100 influential organisations have affiliated to the JLA. Affiliation is without charge, and is available to organisations and individuals wishing to support the aims and workings of the JLA. The JLA is keen to extend its work into new therapeutic areas, and will welcome clinicians and patients willing to work together to develop and advance the methods initiated by the initial working partnerships. RSM Sections would seem to be well placed to make useful contributions in this way. Details of JLA activities and how to affiliate are available on the JLA website www.lindalliance.org

Dr John Scadding and Sir Iain Chalmers