

International Collaboration on Participatory Health Research

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By Jonathan Boote, Tina Cook and Janet Harris

The International Collaboration on Participatory Health Research (ICPHR) was established in 2009, to strengthen the role of participatory health research (PHR) in intervention design and decision-making on health issues. The Collaboration currently has 79 endorsing members drawn from 16 countries across Asia, Europe, Australasia, and North and South America. Following the principles of open access and network building, membership of the ICPHR is open to any person or organisation with an interest in its aims, and there are no membership charges. The work of the members is undertaken on a voluntary basis and is dependent on the support of the organisations they represent and on project-related grants.

Each year, the ICPHR holds a three-day working meeting to review progress against its objectives and to plan the next year's initiatives. The inaugural meeting of the ICPHR was held in Berlin in 2010, and last year, the meeting took place in Toronto. This May, 21 ICPHR members – from Brazil, Mexico, France, Canada, the UK, Germany and Portugal – met in the beautiful university town of Coimbra, Portugal. On the first day of the meeting, after a group warm up exercise, in which we had to collectively transport a raw egg down a flight of stairs and along a corridor without touching it, a world cafe enabled delegates to update each other about the various

exciting PHR initiatives in which they are involved. We heard about a recently-published realist review of the impact of PHR relationships; an ongoing systematic review of the PHR literature published in Portuguese; an international course on PHR currently in development; a protocol for reaching consensus on how the quality of PHR studies could be determined; and a project to establish a database or repository of good-quality examples of PHR.

On the second day of the meeting, delegates split into smaller groups to discuss specific projects and to brainstorm research and paper ideas which could benefit from a cross-cultural or multi-country approach. For example, it was agreed that a comparative paper examining the policy contexts, and the facilitators and barriers impacting on PHR in different countries should be developed by Collaboration members. Ideas developed in the small group sessions were then presented to the main group, which considered how Google Documents, with its various translation facilities, could be used to develop papers by ICPHR members who speak and write in different languages.

The late afternoon of the second day was set aside for sightseeing, and delegates took full advantage of this to explore the famous old University of Coimbra, with its sumptuous baroque library and graduation chamber. The second day was rounded off in style by a lovely meal in the old town, which showcased Portuguese cuisine and wine at its finest.

On the final day of the meeting, we agreed on the work plan for the Collaboration for the next year. Delegates departed feeling energised, and looking forward to the next meeting of the ICPHR, which will take place in the UK in June 2013, hosted by the University of Northumbria.

If you would like to contribute to the work of the ICPHR, please visit www.icphr.org/en/mission

About the authors

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