

EDITORIAL

Cultivating a Research Culture in Allied Health Sciences: An Essential Investment

We are very much delighted to announce the launch of the first research journal of the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), *OUSL Journal of Health Sciences (OUSLJHS)*, in conjunction with the 10th anniversary celebration of the FHS. The publication of the inaugural issue of the *OUSLJHS* symbolises a significant milestone for the Faculty to inculcate a multidisciplinary research culture by enabling an intellectual forum for diverse health professionals to publish their evidence-based research, thus promoting research advocacy locally and globally.


In today's global higher education landscape, research impact is one of the key indicators in measuring institutional excellence (Times Higher Education, 2015; Boholano et al., 2014). Evidence from international health systems demonstrates that organisations with strong research cultures achieve better clinical outcomes, stronger staff retention, greater innovation, and more efficient services (Harding et al., 2017). Yet, allied health professionals commonly face obstacles such as time constraints, skill gaps, lack of mentorship, and limited institutional support, and such barriers can weaken both motivation and confidence in conducting research (Pager et al., 2012). Building a sustainable research culture therefore requires intentional, long-term investment at the individual, departmental, and institutional levels, extending beyond isolated research case studies through fostering inquiry and scholarly engagement via encompassing shared norms, values, motivations, and behaviours (Tikhonova & Raitskaya, 2024). In view of this notion, integrating ongoing research into working practices of all allied health practitioners such as nurses, medical laboratory technologists, radiographers, physiotherapists, pharmacists, psychologists, and counsellors can urge them to incorporate their research findings into the existing work culture, which is crucial in enhancing the efficiency of the healthcare practices in any country.

The development of research culture can be understood through stages similar to the Gestation–Expansion–Maturation model proposed by Olvido (2021). The gestation stage focuses on laying foundational capacities: training staff in basic research skills, embedding research into undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, providing mentorship, and supporting early attempts at proposal writing and manuscript development. Activities at this stage may appear modest. However, they generate essential outputs such as conducting research and producing written work. These foundational experiences help emerging allied health researchers to build confidence and competence, while signalling that the institution values inquiry as a core component of professional practice.



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As institutions progress into the expansion stage, the focus shifts from production to dissemination. Research outputs begin to reach broader audiences through conference presentations, seminars, departmental research forums, and journal publications. This stage requires reinforced support systems such as incentives for research activity, funding for conference travel, research writing groups, and robust peer review processes. Dissemination strengthens scholarly identity, enhances collaboration, and ensures that research meets appropriate standards of rigour.

The maturation stage represents a fully developed research culture, where research findings are consistently utilised in practice through policy formulation, innovative creations with measurable impact, and improved services for the betterment of patients' well-being. While not all allied health units will produce patents or technological products, all can strive for research that is meaningful, usable, and responsive to community and health system needs. Such a culture normalises the expectation that allied health professionals not only implement evidence but also generate it.

In this context, the *OUSLJHS* is positioned to play a transformative role across all these stages by offering a supportive space for emerging researchers for professional development, encouraging interdisciplinary research collaboration bridging between academia, and clinical practices, ensuring that research remains grounded in local and global health priorities, and providing an accessible and credible platform for publishing allied health research, thereby strengthening the national capacity for allied health professionals.

Moreover, cultivating a robust research culture in the allied health sciences demands a sustained collective commitment. Institutional leaders must ensure the provision of adequate infrastructure facilities, incentives, and continuous capacity-building opportunities to enable researchers to engage effectively in scholarly activity. Concurrently, educators and clinicians should embrace inquiry-driven practice and actively mentor emerging researchers, thereby strengthening the ongoing development of competent research professionals within the field. In this context, allied health professionals must be supported to view research as a strategic investment and an integral component of their professional role which enhances their identity, authority, and contribution to evidence-based practice. Importantly, such investment must be both sustained and strategic, through long-term funding mechanisms, protected time for research, structured mentorship, and policies that recognise and reward scholarly productivity, acknowledging that meaningful cultural transformation develops progressively over time.

As we launch the inaugural issue of *OUSLJHS*, we firmly believe that the allied health professionals in Sri Lanka undoubtedly will pave the way forward in generating a research culture through evidence-based research. A strong research culture is not merely a destination but is

the driving force that enhances healthcare practice, strengthens institutions, and supports the development of a resilient and responsive health system.

We take this opportunity to invite you to submit your next manuscript to *OUSLJHS* as we strive to make a meaningful and long-lasting impact on human society through health research.

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