



Registered Charity No 1003392

HealthWatch student prize competition for critical evaluation of clinical research protocols

The competition is open to all full time undergraduate students and post-graduate students taking a taught master's course in medicine, dentistry, nursing, midwifery and professions allied to medicine. Post-graduate research students are not eligible to enter. Entries are welcome from eligible students in any country. Students in their final year of study are also eligible to enter.

Entries are judged in two classes: students of medicine and dentistry, and students of nursing, midwifery and professions allied to medicine. There is a first prize of £500 and up to 5 runner-up prizes of £100 in each class.

The competition consists of four hypothetical research protocols to be evaluated and critiqued. In devising the protocols, the judges have worked with a checklist of the various features that a good research protocol should include, and have ranked them in order according to how many of these features are included.

Your first task is to rank the protocols, and the first stage of judging your entries is to compare your ranking of the protocols (in order of quality from best to worst) with this predetermined ranking. All entrants who have the correct ranking will receive a certificate of merit when the results are announced, and all will be assessed in the second stage of judging.

Your second task is to explain, in no more than 600 words altogether, your reasons for the ranking you have given, discussing each protocol in a separate paragraph. You should imagine that you are a member of a research funding body, and explain why you would award a grant to the protocol that you rank first, as well as explaining the strengths and weaknesses of each of the protocols. If a protocol is fatally flawed say so; if there are minor flaws, indicate how they could be improved. There is no need to comment on, or analyse, the statistical methods that are proposed. You are assessing the methodological quality of the protocol, not the desirability of the aim. Each protocol starts (as it should) with a "scientific background" summarising previous relevant research. You should assume this is work correctly cited from reliable sources.

Entries will first be assessed for the number of the key criteria of a good research protocol that you mention as being present or absent in each of the protocols. The protocols are each marked out of 10, and in order to be eligible for a prize you must achieve a score of 28 (70%) or more. For all entries reaching this threshold the judges will then consider your arguments and critique of the protocols to determine the prize winners. Prize winners will be invited to the HealthWatch Annual General Meeting in London in October to receive their prizes. Travelling expenses at student travel rates will be reimbursed; for entrants outside the UK up to £100 will be allowed for travel expenses. Entrants who cannot attend the AGM will have their certificates and cheques sent by post.

Submission of entries is via the HealthWatch website, and all entries are forwarded automatically to the student prize coordinator, who undertakes the first stage of judging — sorting those entries that have given the predetermined correct ranking. All entries that qualify are then forwarded to the judges with no indication of the name of the entrant. All entrants will be invited to join HealthWatch as student members, who pay no subscription, and in the summer of their graduation will be invited to continue their free membership for a further two years.



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You have three months between the launch of the competition and the deadline for submission of entries; do not leave your entry until the last minute. Entries submitted after midnight on the day of the deadline will not be accepted, and no extension to the deadline can be allowed for any reason.

The judges' decision is final, and no correspondence can be entered into. We cannot provide examples of winning entries, but examples of previous protocols and critiques will be made available in due course as part of Student HealthWatch learning resources.

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