



Guts UK 50 years old: onwards and upwards

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Guts UK 50 years old – onwards and upwards

Dear Editor,

Guts UK is 50 years old. Despite many advances since its foundation there is plenty left to be done. Funding for research into gut, liver and pancreas diseases, has always been modest compared with their clinical impact.(1) The UK Medical Research Council was established in 1919(2) when gastroenterology barely existed as a specialty – the British Society of Gastroenterology (BSG) was not formed till 1937.(3) Medical Research Council funding reflected priorities of the day such as infectious disease and neurological disorders.

In 1971 the Council of the BSG, noting the paucity of research funding, set up the Digestive Disorders Trust Fund with Dr Thomas Hunt, a founder member of the BSG, as its first President. Sir Francis Avery Jones succeeded Dr Hunt from 1980 and the charity gradually expanded its research support and developed a very successful patient information programme.

In the modern era gastroenterology research remains disappointingly underfunded. The Cooksey report (2006) noted “that the overall funding pattern was generally in line with the UK Disability Adjusted Life Year rates, with the exception of Respiratory and Gastrointestinal research, where funding is substantially lower than the comparative burden of the disease.”(4)

Gastroenterology research in the UK is therefore particularly dependent on charitable support. Charitable grants are often relatively small but they tend to yield very good value for money. A formal review that assessed journal impact, citations over five-years, and citation in US patents, showed that charitable funded gastroenterological research had greater impact than research council or commercially funded research, by all the measures used.(5)

The Digestive Disorders Fund subsequently rebadged itself as the British Digestive Foundation, then CORE (a rather enigmatic title “gifted” by a marketing company), and since 2018 by the more direct “means what is says on the tin” Guts UK. Since the first grant in 1974 nearly £16 million has been invested into 281 research projects across gastrointestinal, liver and pancreatic disease, allocated through a competitive and impartial process. The impacts of these awards are tabulated on the Guts UK website.(6) Not only is the research impact very high but so also is the quality of researchers supported, including the esteemed editor of this journal, many of whom have been funded at early points in their careers and gone on to be research leaders.

We are moving on with a much stronger public-facing profile. Our website <https://gutscharity.org.uk> is now visited by over 4000 users per day (Figure 1). Up-to-date peer-reviewed information is provided for patients and clinicians, either downloadable or via purchase of pamphlets. We also partner other Charities to provide joint funding and work closely with the BSG in Priority Setting Partnerships to define future research strategy. We prioritise support for research in areas not well covered by other charities and start-up grants for new researchers.

Whilst we now celebrate our 50th anniversary much still needs to be done. We very much hope that readers, perhaps particularly including past grantholders, might consider further generous support. Guts UK is your charity too!

(495 words)

Julie Harrington, CEO Guts UK

John McLaughlin, Deputy Chair of Trustees, Guts UK

Jonathan Rhodes, Chair of Trustees, Guts UK

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6. Guts UK funded research, publications and their impact. Downloadable from: <https://gutscharity.org.uk/research/our-research-impact/>

Legend to Figure 1. Guts UK website trajectory 2018 to present. CORE was renamed as Guts UK in 2018.

