

New health research 'explainer' tool

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Credit: Medical Research Council

The MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, based at the University of Glasgow, today launches a free, interactive [website opens in new window](#) designed to explain complex health research.

The [Understanding Health Research opens in new window](#) website is the creation of a collaboration between the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit and an advisory panel of academics.

Despite advances in open access publishing making scientific health research easier to access, the style and language of published research papers can prove inaccessible to non-specialist or non-scientific

audiences.

The Understanding Health Research tool is designed to help anyone interested in understanding a specific piece of published health research. With health research in the news every day, and with patients being more involved in decision-making, it is important that patients and the public have the support and ability to find and understand [health research](#).

The website asks the user to answer a series of questions about a piece of research selected by the user, and provides guidance on what these questions mean. The questions aim to encourage critical thinking about the type and quality of the research, such as funding sources, peer review and ethics, and guide the user towards forming an evidence-based opinion about the research.

Succinct, plain English introductions of complex scientific concepts are also provided, as well as links to resources promoting health literacy.

Dr Shona Hilton, Deputy Director of MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, said: "Understanding Health Research is a tool that can really help people to ask the right questions to understand and evaluate research studies.

"Without the tools to assess contradictory health messages and claims about new discoveries and treatments, the public are vulnerable to false hope, emotional distress, financial exploitation and serious health risks."

Dr David Ogilvie, MRC Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge, said: "More and more scientific papers are out there on the internet, freely available for anyone to read. But providing access to papers is not the same thing as making research accessible to people.

Tools like Understanding Health Research can help make science more

democratic and more useful by making it easier for people to engage with it, whether they work with [health](#) evidence in their jobs or are just interested citizens."

Provided by Medical Research Council

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