IUGA Fellows’ Research Network (FRN)
Policy and Procedures

Background

The International Urogynecological Association (IUGA) is a non-profit international organization dedicated to the advancement of urogynecological knowledge and practice around the world. Each year since 1975 the association has held an international meeting, which provides a valuable opportunity for accredited urogynecologists and training fellows to meet, and present novel research findings.

Multi-centre studies have become a key route to answering the most pressing clinical questions in urogynecology. Indeed in recent years the IUGA award for best presentation of a clinical study has always been won by a multi-centre study. Such studies enable recruitment of large samples of patients, and the application of novel interventions in a more generalisable setting. To support multi-centre studies, research networks have been established, including one specifically for fellows led by Society of Gynecologic Surgeons, from which this document was developed. Research networks allow timely recruitment and completion of studies, and can help to involve researchers who would not otherwise have the time or resources to participate, in the benefits of multi-centre research.

In 2011 IUGA proposed the establishment of a Fellows’ Research Network (FRN), in order to offer urogynecology fellows around the world the opportunity to be actively involved in developing, implementing, conducting, and publishing multi-centre research studies.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the IUGA-FRN is to enable fellows to work cooperatively with leaders in the field of urogynecology to conduct multi-center research projects. The network provides the opportunity to form ties with colleagues throughout the world that will continue long after fellowship. Participation in the IUGA-FRN should help members become more effective researchers in their future careers.

Organization of the IUGA-FRN

Membership of the FRN is open to any IUGA member who is currently in a training or fellowship post and wishes to be an active participant in the network’s activities. The activities of the FRN will be overseen by the IUGA-FRN Subcommittee, which will consist of an elected fellow as chair and 3-5 elected fellows as members following nominations by the IUGA Fellows’ Committee. Terms are up to three years based on date of graduation from fellowship. New members will be elected to serve on the FRN Subcommittee annually at the IUGA-FRN meeting. The number of fellows elected will equal the number of openings on the committee. The
The objective will be to have some openings each year to ensure that there is steady replacement of the membership. Fellows are elected to the FRN subcommittee by anonymous vote of the current members and Advisory Board members present at the meeting. The IUGA-FRN Advisory Board will include up to 6 members who will serve two-year terms and will provide mentorship and supervision. Replacement of Advisory Board members should ensure that there is not sudden replacement of all members. Any IUGA member is eligible to apply to sit on the advisory board and their selection will be made by vote among FRN subcommittee members based on academic criteria.

The FRN Subcommittee will be in liaison with IUGA Research & Development Committee in order to facilitate development and promotion of research projects through IUGA fellows and award grant funding where applicable.

The IUGA-FRN Subcommittee will take responsibility for:

- Planning IUGA-FRN meetings
- Administering funds, preparing budgets, meeting financial reporting requirements
- Communication with the Advisory Board
- Communication with the IUGA-FRN members

Meetings

The FRN Subcommittee will meet at least every three months through conference calls or as necessary. Regular conference calls will be held with the Advisory Board and Principal Investigators to provide project updates and conduct other necessary business.

Project Principal Investigators

When a proposal is selected by the IUGA-FRN for implementation as a multi-center research project, the fellow who developed the proposal becomes the project Principal Investigator (PI). PI’s responsibilities include:

- Regular updates to the FRN Steering Committee and Advisory Board
- Attending all IUGA-FRN meetings
- Accountability for meeting project deadlines, using research funding appropriately and completing research project.
- Coordination of all participating study sites in liaison with the Steering Committee
- Providing project leadership, including authorship decisions and conflict resolution

Protocol Development and Implementation

Completed structured mini-proposals will be accepted for presentation annually during the Fellows’ Research Network meeting at the IUGA annual meeting. All fellows are invited to submit a proposal. Members of the IUGA Fellows Committee and IUGA FRN Subcommittee, who submit proposals as PIs are automatically excluded from the screening panel and the
subsequent preferential voting. All proposals will be screened by the FRN Subcommittee and Advisory Board prior to the annual meeting. New unfunded projects will be selected by vote of the IUGA-FRN members with input from the Advisory Board Members either prior or during the annual IUGA meeting. In case of FRN grant applications, up to 2 new funded projects will be selected each year via preferential voting during the IUGA annual IUGA meeting.

After a research proposal is accepted, protocol development will be completed by the project team and coordinated by the principal investigator. The project team consists of the Principal Investigator (PI), the PI’s own academic supervisor/mentor and one investigator from each recruiting centre. A member of the Advisory Board will serve as project advisor and mentor protocol development, in addition to the PI’s own supervisor. Principal Investigators will submit a final protocol, which includes both a budget of the project (where applicable) and the timeline for completion. This has to be reviewed and approved by the FRN Subcommittee and Advisory Board before implementation of protocol or before distribution of funding (where applicable). During the development of the project timeline, advisors will assist in planning submission of abstracts and manuscripts in an effort to maximize dissemination of research.

**Ethics and Anonymity**

Each project site shall adhere to its own IRB/REC requirements for research. Each site will collect data and send de-identified data to the principal investigator for analysis. Storage of data will be at the individual sites as well as the principal investigator site during the study period. All data remains the property of the Network at the conclusion of the study.

**Dissemination of information**

A member of each project group shall be responsible for writing the minutes of each conference call and meeting and submit this to the FRN Subcommittee. Subsequently, the minutes will be distributed to the IUGA-FRN members and Advisory Board.

**Funding (only applicable to FRN grants)**

The management and administration of the budget shall be the responsibility of the FRN Chair in conjunction with IUGA secretary/treasurer with the support of rest of the FRN members and the Advisory Board. Individual study budgets are established at the beginning of a project. Study budgets will be reassessed at the annual meetings or as necessary. Each study principal investigator shall be responsible for maintaining their project’s budget for the duration of the project. The PI is responsible for preparing study budget reports for the IUGA meeting and at the request of the FRN Subcommittee. Funding may be drawn from IUGA.

**Authorship and dissemination**

Authorship shall reflect the level of participation by IUGA-FRN members in design, data collection, and writing, and will comply with ICMJE criteria for authorship. The first paper or
Abstract submitted by a research project team should have the PI as first or senior author. Criteria to gauge participation and subsequent authorship order will be established during the early stages of the project and approved by the PI and project's attending member of the Advisory Board. Abstracts and papers will be written by the project team members in consultation with the attending project advisor/mentor of the Advisory Board. Authorship will consist of at least one investigator from each recruiting centre. The names of all contributors to the funded multi-centre study will be acknowledged. All abstracts and papers must be submitted for review by all authors 2 weeks prior to any submission. The project team is required to submit an abstract of their completed research study for presentation at the IUGA annual meeting and submit the first completed manuscript for publication to the International Urogynecology Journal. The selection of further meetings and journals for abstract and manuscript submission will be made by the PI and project team in consultation with the attending member of the Advisory Board.