Peter Stratton, Chair of EFTA Research Committee

I have now chaired the EFTA-RC for 6 years and anticipate that the newly elected Board in Athens will want to take stock of how it wants its research committee to operate. It therefore seems a good time to offer a report of our activities.

EFTA has valued the roles that research can play in supporting its political agendas as well as in training and advancing Systemic Couple and Family Therapy (SCFT). Especially outcome-research has been crucial for many national associations either to become part or - after the economic crisis - to stay in the national health care systems. With the development of the outcome measurement SCORE and the decision to translate the measurement into different European languages, an ongoing major project of the research committee and the research working task force in the chamber of NFTO started. At a Board meeting in Lisbon, 2010 it was decided to establish the existing research committee more formally. A decision was made to give the Chair of the committee a standing position on the Board Ex Officio, and Peter Stratton was elected as Chair of the Research Committee. Since this time membership of the EFTA Research Committee has been through active participation in one of its projects. In 2016 we have five projects.

Project 1. To investigate the possibilities of funding for Europe-wide research. Under the leadership of Mauro Mariotti (Italy) we have submitted two major proposals for EU funding with participation by twelve EFTA organisations, which received positive feedback but finally were not accepted. Currently we are engaging with a major project funded by Italian companies which has the objective of significantly improving health and ecological viability in medium sized towns. The companies are major energy producers and food producers that ask for our experience on families to better promote the use of green food and energy for families who are keen and prepared to the use of improved products. We are presenting the case that families should be at the heart of the planning and that implementation should be using proven systemic interventions.

Secondly a proposal to Horizon 2020- Project: SC1-PM-07-2017: Promoting mental health and well-being in the young- to be presented before October 2016 –

Research Project title: Improving Children’s mental health through the use of basics of systems theories and techniques. The main hypothesis is that a family who knows and reflects about relational patterns, who avoid the process of triangulation to the children, who is competent in maintaining proper distances among different generations, who uses self reflexive thinking and shows a good degree of mentalization: is a family who develops Resilience of their children.

We would like to test the hypothesis that young couples exposed to a systemic training during the pregnancy or during the first years of life of their children will better protect the mental health of their children

Research design: 6 different researching groups involved

- Sample of couples with children up to 5 years who will complete a trial and a relational evaluation and an evaluation of the child. The trial will be of six sessions plus catamnesis at 6,12,24,48 months.

Project 2. A survey of research relevant to family wellbeing and health promotion, while looking for connections to the official rhetoric about it in each country. Led by Angela Abela (Malta) we are working on defining a research project into how systemic therapy in conjunction with a systemic way of intervening at a contextual level is the best way to help underserved families to re-edit their stories around trauma and poverty. We have been planning a pilot study within EFTA’s own resources to be a basis for an application for EU funding for a substantive investigation. In the process this objective has converged with Project 1 and so this aspect of Project 2 will be added to the H2020 part of that Project. Meanwhile a wellbeing element of Project 4 is reported below. This leaves us
with materials for a survey of approaches to measuring wellbeing and associated research literature which would be worth consolidating towards a position statement that EFTA could use to support provision of systemic family therapy. This version of Project 2 could be taken up by members of the committee who are not currently actively involved in any existing project, or by a member of EFTA who is new to the committee.

Project 3. Collating research published in the last 10 years that is currently only available in the language of the country in which it originated. This project falls naturally to the NFTOs and we will start by creating a repository of quality student dissertations. We need to do basic work to create a central repository or Esourse, before proceeding further.

Project 4. Researching potential uses of the SCORE Index of Family Functioning. Luigi Schepisi, Maria Borcsa, Roberto Pereira and Jose Soriano and with contributions from therapists in many European countries. The SCORE-15 has been translated by EFTA members into 18 European languages (all available on the EFTA website http://www.europeanfamilytherapy.eu/score-15 ) with data being collected to test the usability and validity of the version for each country. Several papers have already been published or presented from this work for example: Borcsa & Schelenhaus (2011), Rivas & Pereira (2015); Józefik, Matusiak, Wolska, & Ulasińska (2015); Vilaça, de Sousa, Stratton, & Relvas (2015), Schepisi & Paolini (2016) and several from Alan Carr’s team e.g., Hamilton, Carr, Cahill, Cassells & Hartnett et al. (2015), O’Hanrahan et al. (2016). A full set of SCORE publications is provided below. Increasingly, through discussions and the surveys we have in process we can compare outcomes and also different ways of using SCORE to support systemic therapy in the different countries.

Roberto Pereira reports that there is now collaboration between the Iberian countries, Portugal and Spain. In 2015 both countries ended the validation process, and the Score was presented with a great success during the III Iberical Congress of FT. It was shown that the Score-15 adapted to Spanish is a reliable and valid instrument capable of measuring the change in the therapeutic process through 3 dimension, built by 5 items each. The next step will be to get the frequent use of the questionnaire by the family therapists from both countries in their clinical practice and research. To arrive to this aim, they have signed an agreement with the Portuguese society of FT - SPTF - and the Spanish federation of FT - FEATF - in order to spread usage of the Score. Both organizations will support it and have placed the Score on their web pages, in addition to correction templates and explanatory videos about the correct way of utilization and correction of the SCORE-15.

Luigi Schepisi has conducted a survey of users in Italy and describes focusing on the differences between clinical and non-clinical SCORES. Also has been presenting substantial data comparing differences between total and sub-scales scores across administrations. (first vs. second and first vs. final).

We have been combining the non-clinical version of SCORE with a simple wellbeing scale to examine in detail the relationships between different aspects of wellbeing and components of SCORE-15. We have data from Italian trainees; UK trainees, and Italian qualified therapists (50 in each group), and 100 German general public. We have also conducted a survey of all of the SCORE users who have communicated by email, to investigate in detail the issues that have arisen in its application, and their innovations in application both for monitoring effectiveness and as a clinical tool. Approx. 50 respondents in the UK, 25 from the rest of Europe.

Project 5. To gather data on the needs of training courses as they enhance their use of research in training. This project is led by Monica Whyte (Ireland) with support of the TIC and NFTO Boards: a questionnaire has been circulated to all TIC Institutes to determine the research training of the providers of family therapy training across our network, the skills that our trainees are developing in research activity and the support needs that may be identified by the training institutes for the future. Preliminary results will be reported by Monica in Athens.
Since 2013 EFTA has also been collaborating with research activities of other bodies. Angela Abela is our official representative on the Child and Family Therapy section of the Society for Psychotherapy Research, and we are playing a full role in the Heidelberg series of International Systemic Research Conferences (see www.systemisch-forschen.de).

Since 2015 we have an annual budget of 1000EUR. We guard this carefully so that whatever is spent contributes directly to ongoing research projects. We communicate mostly by email and meet by Skype while taking the opportunity to meet face-to-face at EFTA events. As proposed to the Board, at all General Meetings, and through a permanent announcement on the EFTA Website, we will warmly welcome EFTA members who want to play an active role on one of our existing projects, or who want to propose a new project.

Members of the Research Committee
Peter Stratton (Chair)
Mauro Mariotti (Project 1)
Angela Abela (Project 2)
José Soriano Pacheco, Roberto Pereira, Maria Borcsa & Luigi Schepisi; (Project 4)
Monica Whyte (Projects 3 and 5)
Martine Nisse; Muselle Sophie; Nevena Calovska; Thierry Darnaud.

SCORE recent references


Vilaça, M., Relvas, A.P. & Stratton, P. (submitted) Comparison of the Short and Long Versions of the Systemic Clinical Outcome and Routine Evaluation (SCORE) in Community and Clinical Samples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*..
