



Improving patient care through participation in research

One front line GP practice explains how both patients and staff have benefited through participation in primary care research; in an article featured in the January RCGP Clinical News to celebrate the milestone achievement of 1000 GP practices becoming 'Research Ready' accredited.

Active GP and practice research lead Dr Matt Hoghton explains how his patients, practice staff and his work as a GP have benefitted through participating in research.

The value of research participation to the GP; Learning through practice

Participating in research makes me a better GP, as it exposes me to the latest ideas and evidence that support clinical decision making; keeping me up to date by constantly challenges my approaches to delivery of high quality of care to our practice patients and their carers.

The value of research to patients; Aware and involved

In my experience patients are very positive about participating in research, trusting its relevance and importance to individuals and the wider UK patient population. Our patients have become more aware of the importance of research within the NHS; we advertise opportunities to participate in research studies, empowering patients to make informed decisions to participate in appropriate research studies. Whilst during participation in research patients often receive better quality of monitoring, most will altruistically participate so that others will potentially benefit.

Long term benefits, a case study; Improving outcomes for patients with learning difficulties

Tragically, patients with learning difficulties die approximately 16 years earlier than the general population. Participating in the research study "The Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths of people with intellectual disabilities in the UK", published in the *Lancet*¹ has significantly impacted my approach to care. This work involved health and social care professionals at all levels, reflecting on the care they had provided to people with intellectual disabilities prior to their death.

As a GP participating in this study has helped me to recognise the lack of physical activity, poor diet and reasonable adjustments for my patients with intellectual disabilities. In particular it emphasised the importance of integrating with social care and not solely focussing on the medical care provision. During consultation I now place greater emphasis on lifestyle changes, the person's circle of support and providing information in an easy read and accessible format.

Professional development through research; an overview

Participating in research has created a new layer of opportunities for professional development of both clinical and administrative staff whose research skills are certified through the "Good Clinical practice" course. Practice staff develop new collaborative networks with researchers and other research nurses which also benefits their day to day roles and facilitates sharing best practice. Through research we have a dynamic adaptable team able to take on the new challenges.

Professional development; Managing more than the practice

Our very skilled practice manager, Julie Davidson, is personally interested in research and has benefited greatly through developing unique expertise, valued within the practice, giving her significant authority as an expert within our CCG. Julie told me that "the practice has been able to develop and test different models of service delivery to suit different studies, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of our team and our processes. E.g. evaluating the role of the Physician's Associate in primary care; delivering a Nurse-led triage system"

Julie's research related skills benefit our practice in many other ways; e.g. taking on new projects or activities and managing effective patient recruitment without impacting on everyday practice activities. She is significant in supporting evaluation and analysis of the end result whether this is research or not.

Professional Development; Nursing an interest

Our practice nurses are often unsung heroes of research studies, providing unique support for patients. The nurses individually benefit from supporting research activities through professional development as well as wider interaction with researchers and other practice. Practice nurses are at the front line during research, often leading recruitment and data collection. Many of our patients will ask questions of our nurses that they wouldn't ask of the doctors, and our nurses are able to provide explanations that support our patients' involvement and allay any concerns.

The professional network supported by research

My practice carries out research as part of the Primary Care Research Network (PCRN), enabling us to benchmark ourselves with other practices and learn through shared experiences. It is amazing to see how well other practices in the network perform, especially with issues such as patient recruitment. One helpful side effect (although not the motivating factor) is the income generated; this helps to keep the entire team focussed.

We operate as part of a hub and spoke model within a federation of practices. As the "research hub" we lead on research activities supporting other "spoke" practices in developing their research skills and participating in research activities (other practices lead on other aspects of care).

The whole practice community supporting research

All the partners are involved on some level, either actively or passively, which I feel is important. They are supportive, recognising the importance of research participation as a positive experience for staff and patients.

Our patient partnership group are an important part of the practice community and help to highlight the importance of research, supporting us with their communications, leaflets and letters to our patients.

Dipping your toe in the water; advice for starting research

If your practice is interested in participating in research for the first time I would suggest talking to other practices, particularly those that have started research activities recently to find out more. In addition I would recommend talking to your local PCRN and becoming Research Ready Accredited will help you to understand and meet the requirements to carry out research within the UK.

The benefits of being Research Ready and participating in research

We are pleased to be one of the 1000 Research Ready Accredited practices in the UK. As the Medical Director of CIRC I am also personally proud of the RCGP's success in providing this support for research practices.

Primary Care research opportunities are growing in the UK. I have seen first hand enhanced patient experience and outcomes through research participation. A recent review confirms the likelihood of positive impacts on health care performance when clinicians and health care organisations engage in research². Other countries observe the success of the UK's model for supporting primary care research and seek opportunities to learn from us.

On a country level research brings economic growth to the UK by developing a strong base of primary care research that attracts global companies to place their research within the UK. Being research ready accredited provides GP practices with new opportunities to develop their business, their staff and their processes. It also presents opportunities for practices to test new ideas and contribute to evidence gathering by evaluating new ideas that ultimately improve patient care and outcomes.

For further information visit the Research Ready accreditation website: <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/researchready>

¹Heslop P., Blair P.S., Fleming P., Hoghton M., Marriott A., Russ L. The Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths of people with intellectual disabilities in the UK: a population-based study. *The Lancet* 2013 doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(13)62026-7

²Hanney S., Boaz A., Jones T., Soper B. Engagement in research: an innovative three-stage review of the benefits for health-care performance. *Health Serv Deliv Res* 2013; 1(8) doi:10.33/hsdr01080