

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT THERE: ORGANISING AND RUNNING AN AWARENESS WEEK

Project Description

Dementia research gives individuals the opportunity to take part in new trials, learn about the condition and contribute to the development of treatment pathways and the care of future people with dementia. Raising awareness of such research is imperative for this progress to continue. Realising this, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, working in partnership with Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust, set up an innovative way to prioritise promoting dementia research in hospitals – a Join Dementia Research Awareness Week.

Across acute hospital settings, memory assessment centres at Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust and GP clinics, the Dementia teams, with the support of the local Clinical Research Network North West Coast, worked to increase awareness, recruitment and involvement in Join Dementia Research. From flash mob singers to personalised Join

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Dementia Research cakes; from a local MP sign-up to a live twitter chat, the week generated patient, staff and family interest.

Promotional activities

“You need to spark an interest; it needs to be something a bit different”. These are the words of Nichola Verstraelen, Lancashire Teaching Hospital’s Lead Dementia Research Nurse. She recognises that innovative ideas are often key to public engagement and successful awareness campaigns.

Dementia singers

People with dementia appear to respond to music in remarkable ways. Perhaps prompting a physiological response in the brain, music seems to trigger memories and emotions in ways other forms of communication do not. The hospital staff witnessed this first hand. Hiring a choir of singers (AWEsome), a flash mob paraded hospital bays, wards and corridors. It did indeed spark an incredible reaction among many of the dementia patients; and Nichola described seeing one patient “just come to life”. Many of the staff, relatives and patients’ joined in and reminisced on past memories evoked by the music.

Tea and cake

If a flash mob of singers aren’t everyone’s cup of tea, coffee and cake might suit. The team decorated fairy cakes with personalised Join Dementia Research icing and handed them out throughout the day. Banners and leaflets were also dispersed across the hospitals. Not only does this invite conversation about dementia research, but it shows the commitment and care of the research nurses.

Live sign-ups and interviews

Demonstrating the ease of signing up to Join Dementia Research not only raises awareness but prompts others to take action – particularly if this is done by the Chief Executive and the local MP. Accompanied by a live interview, the Chief Executive of Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and the local MP signing up to Join Dementia Research was captured on film. Prominent sign-ups such as these show local commitment to the campaign and widen the target audience. It encourages interest from a more diverse audience, demonstrating that Join Dementia Research benefits from healthy volunteers of all ages too, not solely individuals with dementia.

Indeed, the Trust also recorded an interview with a staff member who was currently taking part in a study. The study is investigating the effects of a brain training app, involving a few brain training games and a simple mobile-friendly memory test.

As well as demonstrating the diversity of studies available to the public, the Trust highlighted the advantages of taking part in studies, in particular for people with dementia. For example, one interview told the story of a local counsellor and her husband's experience of their involvement in research and

the sense of purpose contributing to dementia research can give. As well as raising awareness of Join Dementia Research, this often provokes action, as individuals are able to relate to others who may be in similar situations to themselves and appreciate the benefits of research participation.

Awareness in the media

The key to a successful awareness campaign is often widespread media involvement. The team made efforts to ensure this was the case. Locally, the MP wrote about the awareness week, and his experience of signing up to Join Dementia Research in his column for the borough's newspaper. As well as illustrating the borough's support for the campaign, Lytham's parliamentary support is hoped to encourage other local MPs to get involved in Join Dementia Research awareness campaigns, particularly as it shows support for the Prime Minister's' Challenge on Dementia 2020.

The team also sent out a broadcast on the hospital radio, promoting Join Dementia Research and the activities taking place. This can hopefully continue to be played throughout the hospitals, generating ongoing patient awareness of dementia research.

Given the digital age we live in, Social Media has the power to reach a substantial number of people and raise widespread awareness. The team set up a live twitter chat during the day, which even attracted attention from the likes of politician David Blunkett. The public were encouraged to ask questions via Twitter and information and facts about dementia was shared. Tweets were sent out to other celebrities and their Communications teams. The team evaluated the Twitter chat afterwards and were impressed to see that 71,529 Twitter accounts were reached during the Q+A session with more than 182,000 impressions (such as retweets and likes). Though Nichola identified that it is quite difficult to get widespread Social Media attention in the middle of the day. Such methods of promoting awareness might see greater success after hours. Many Trusts also have their own Facebook pages; these could be used to promote local campaigns, which could generate attention from the local community, particularly those who visit the hospital regularly.

Another way to gain extensive interest in the campaign, as noted by Nichola, would be to get the local TV station at the event. This would increase public awareness of the effort, initiatives and activities being done by local staff to promote Join Dementia Research. In turn, this might inspire conversation around dementia research and even new sign-ups. However, a major challenge to awareness campaigns is often how to get the press involved. A press release



Research nurse Nichola Verstraelen with some of the team

was issued to all local and regional media and it was published on Lancashire Teaching Hospitals website and social media pages. However, as the Trusts were aware, press releases are largely dependent upon whether or not it is picked up by mainstream media. They did, however, identify some useful tips for sending out a successful press release. This included speaking to the local Trusts' Communications departments prior to the event to encourage a media presence throughout the awareness week, and including photographs with the press release to draw in more attention.

Knowing your audience

When conducting awareness campaigns in hospital settings, it is easy to assume that the target audience is predominantly patients. However, the Trust took this as an opportunity to raise awareness of Join Dementia Research among not only patients, but also visitors and staff. Nichola notes, "Everybody knows someone with dementia, so not only can the individual with dementia sign up to Join Dementia Research, but they can tell their family members about it".

Campaigning in the acute hospital, memory assessment centre, GP clinics and even hospital restaurants meant the promotion could reach a diverse audience. Notably, it was a great opportunity to create links with staff members across the hospital. Given that these staff have frequent contact with a wide range of patients, raising staff awareness means they may be able to refer suitable individuals to future studies.

Impact

The Join Dementia Research Awareness Week was the first in the country, and the campaign definitely had an impact both on awareness and recruitment. In just one week the promotion secured 80 new sign-ups, with two people currently taking part in a study after signing up in that week. As with any awareness campaign, the more times it is done, and the more Trusts that are involved, the more impact it will have.

What more can be done?

The overarching aim is for Join Dementia Research Awareness Week to become a national yearly affair, with Trusts across the country prioritising promoting dementia research. Nichola adds: "Other Trusts can do

similar activities and we can all learn from each other, finding different ways to raise awareness".

Many Trusts have a Dementia Research Champion, responsible for locally raising the profile of research. It might be an idea for these Champions to attend the awareness week. This could inspire collaborative work across Trusts, the sharing of promotional ideas, and in turn, encourage the progression towards a national annual Join Dementia Research Awareness Week.

Top Tips

- Be inventive with your ideas, don't be afraid to try something different
- Know your audience - this can include patients, family members, hospital visitors, staff
- Find out what your team can manage in terms of support before and during the campaign
- Delegate a co-ordinator and specific tasks to staff members
- Tailor discussions to suit your audience – whether this involves considering how individuals without dementia can sign up and be involved, how staff members can sign-up and promote Join Dementia Research in their working area or about current trials individuals may have the opportunity to take part in
- Be aware of the stigma behind research, taking part in research can be a daunting prospect. When talking to families about Join Dementia Research try to use examples of where others have been involved and assure them that they will be part of a team
- Plan ahead - ideally at least six months in advance
- Speak to your Trust's communications department and the Communications Lead at the NIHR local Clinical Research Network; inform them of the upcoming event and activities you are planning
- Contact the national Join Dementia Research team to inform them of your plans - they can help promote local activities and initiatives
- Utilise Social Media platforms to promote the event and continue to raise awareness of Join Dementia Research

For more information visit:

nhs.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk