

KNOCKING ON AN OPEN DOOR: IMPROVING PATIENT ACCESS TO RESEARCH IN A NEW TRUST

Project Description

In March 2012, the Government set an ambition for ten percent of people with dementia to be involved in clinical trials by 2015. For Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (BHR) this meant embarking on an initiative to increase patient access to research. The Trust previously had a strong research presence across other areas like cancer and oncology, however very little activity was happening in dementias and neurodegenerative diseases.

With the proactivity of one research nurse, research moved further up the priority list. In a short space of eight months the following was achieved:

- Buy-in Trust wide that research was a priority
- All neurologist patients routinely asked if they are interested in taking part in research
- A patient's interest in research involvement recorded on PAS, the Trust's electronic patient information system
- Basic information on research and research activities across the Trust included in all doctor/nurse inductions
- Patient-friendly information provided about research



BHR is one of the largest acute hospital trusts in England with one of the biggest catchment areas in the country, serving a population of around 750,000 people. With its two sites already participating in research across other disease areas, the Trust was extremely eager to get onboard with research into the dementias.

Employing help

Research Nurse Elisa Visentin was employed in the Trust's Neuroscience Department to regularly ask patients if they would like to get involved in research.

Elisa said: "We began approaching patients at clinic, which was a huge success, as 70% of those that we approached gave their consent to be contacted for research. It seemed that by approaching them in clinic it has helped people understand what it is all about. When I first approached patients, many tended to think research was all about being a guinea pig in a trial, but now I have helped to change that misconception".

Project Lead Alison Fowler adds: "It was integral that we employed Elisa to get the project moving. Consultants are extremely busy, so having a dedicated member of staff in the department, meant we had someone to proactively seek out patients, signpost them to current studies or register them on our patient list".

Consultants were also extremely supportive of the initiative. Dr Davy Yeung said: "Many consultants are interested in research, but had been juggling research and their clinical workload. Since the introduction of Elisa, everyone is so pleased that someone has picked up the research agenda and now want to do something similar with other departments like cancer".

Climbing the ladder

Dr Yeung, Associate Director of Research and Innovation at the Trust, puts the phenomenal success of the project partly down to the fact that, "Research previously had taken a back seat and had been seen more as a luxury. But with so much Government support for dementia and research now a requirement [for] receiving NHS Foundation Trust status, [research] is further up everyone's agenda. As well as that, it's also our job to make sure our patients have access to the most advanced innovation and medical treatments".



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Alison adds, "Many were very excited about the new opportunities that research could bring, including greater treatment and care opportunities for patients, professional development for staff, and additional income for the Trust".

To start the initiative, the team wanted to establish a baseline. They did so by measuring the Trust's 'research readiness' on a sliding scale of study experience, Trust culture and infrastructure. Alison comments, "Since they were already behind the cause, getting them more actively involved in research was a simple task. Based on our initial analysis we made recommendations on how they could improve research activity and then helped them to deliver the solutions".

Establishing an ethos

To increase access to research, doctors and nurses needed to first offer it on the menu of care offered to patients.

All the ideas put forward to the Trust were welcomed with open arms.

Activities welcomed by the Trust:

- Producing a video on research to include in the induction programme
- Displaying television stills in patient waiting rooms
- Introducing research in all Trust outpatient letters
- Using an e-learning package with staff to teach them the basics of research
- Initiating a research section on the Trust's electronic patient information system (PAS) so that registering a patient's interest in being involved in research was simple to record and visible to all staff

Averil Dongworth, CEO for the Trust at the time of the project, was very supportive of the ideas. It was her mantra that, "Research is an integral part of the day job, not an added extra that we think about at the end of the day", which gave a very clear message that research was everyone's responsibility.

Dr Yeung adds: "It's our job to make sure patients have the opportunity to take part in research and benefit from new treatments as they are developed. Through the video and TV stills in waiting rooms,

all staff, as well as patients began to understand their personal role in helping researchers finding a breakthrough for dementia and neurodegenerative diseases”.

The success of this initiative has meant that research has gone viral. 100% of neurology clinics are now recording patients’ interest in research and more staff than ever are engaged in research. Due to its triumph, Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS Trust is often held up as an example of what can be achieved in such a short space of time.

Top Tips

- Keep the momentum up and keep staff engaged and enthused all the way through the process
- Ensure your project fits in with organisation or national objectives: this initiative succeeded because the Trust really wanted to do it and because it linked in with national requirements such as the Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia
- Provide strong leadership that will embrace change and make it happen. An email from the Chief Executive and the Medical Directors goes a long way
- Treat instilling a research culture as a long-term investment not as a quick return

For more information visit:

nhs.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk