Implementing the recruitment tool:

The South West's experience

Project Description

The key performance indicator for all NIHR (National Institute for Health Research) research networks including DeNDRoN is recruitment to time and to target for those studies on the NIHR portfolio. It has been well documented that many studies fall short of these targets and this has numerous repercussions including reduced reliability and validity of study results, increased study costs and delayed dissemination of results which may inform clinical practice. This case study is essentially the story of the development and implementation of a recruitment tool to maximise recruitment to DeNDRoN supported studies.

INTEGRATION

CASE STUDY

Implementing the recruitment tool: the South West's experience

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Assessing the issue

The project stemmed from a discussion with my line manager about recruitment and how to ensure we were doing all we could to recruit to time and to target. Two issues came out of this discussion: The first being that in the South West (SW) region, we as a network do not routinely record the recruitment activity we do. Whilst we record recruitment figures every month, we do not record what recruitment strategies we have used for a particular study. Therefore we have no evidence for the work that we do. Moreover, it means that if a study were to be handed over to a colleague, that colleague would have no information about what recruitment strategies had been used previously and which had been successful. Secondly, our discussion led us to think about the different strategies that we use locally and that perhaps we tended to rely on the same strategies for each study, and failed to use strategies we were less familiar with or unaware of. It was only when recruitment started to struggle that we would feel the pressure to try other options for recruitment, rather than exploring all possibilities at the start of the study.

In summary we wanted to create a tool which would allow:

- Documented evidence of the recruitment strategies used for each study
- Consideration of all the different possible recruitment activities that could be used to recruit to studies
- Insight into why some strategies may not be working (i.e. the barriers to certain recruitment strategies)
- A more comprehensive induction for new research nurses and clinical studies officers by helping them become familiar with recruitment strategies

The overarching aim of creating such a tool would be to maximise recruitment to studies in order to reach the recruitment target.

Developing the 'Recruitment Tool'

I took this idea forward and developed the 'Recruitment Tool'. It is essentially a chart which lists of all the possible recruitment strategies that could be used to recruit to studies, a tick box to say whether or not each strategy had been used and then space for free text to explain why it was not used, or if it was used whether it was successful or whether there were barriers to the strategy. The list of strategies was created by asking local research nurses and clinical studies officers (CSOs) from SW DeNDRoN and MHRN (Mental Health Research Network) and from the SW DeNDRoN host NHS Trust. Figure 1 gives an overview of how the tool was piloted.

Facilitating change in practice

The results were very positive. One site reached their recruitment target for the 3 months, and the other exceeded their recruitment target in the month following the end of the pilot. The tool was shown to be particularly useful for the new CSO who reported increased confidence in using 12 of the 14 strategies (see attached graph). Generally there were not any barriers to the strategies used, apart from at one site the CSO discovered that another colleague was duplicating the screening of patient notes. On discussion of these findings and the recruitment tool, it was decided that the study team needed to meet prior to a study starting to produce a recruitment plan and to identify the role of each study team member to avoid duplicating work. This is an example if how the tool can facilitate a change in practice in order to maximise recruitment.

The answers to the questionnaire demonstrated the value of the tool to the CSO role:

'It made you think about what recruitment methods could be tried'

'Useful….to have a list of ideas to try'

'I spoke to a research nurse and she is struggling with recruitment and is new to it. I think she would welcome this sort of tool'
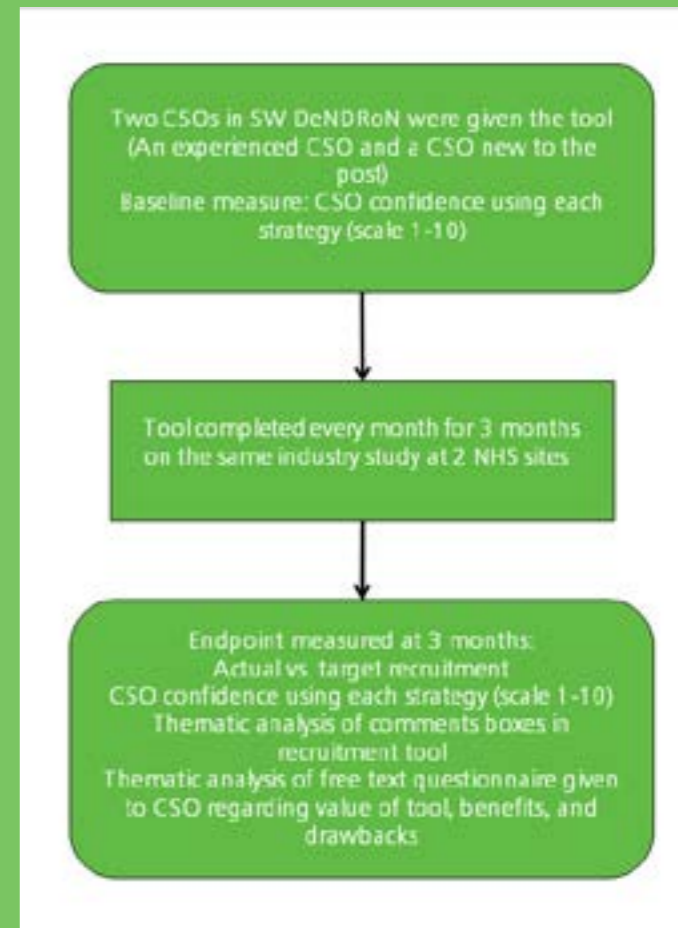

Figure 1: Overview of pilot study of the recruitment tool

Vision

General feedback from the tool has been positive. The preliminary results from the pilot are pending publication and it is planned that a larger evaluation will be conducted this year across a much wider geographical location, and across different networks to test the wider value of the tool.

Success story

Since piloting the tool, it has been used by a new DeNDRoN CSO to help them become familiar with recruitment methods. It became an incredibly important piece of evidence when the DeNDRoN co-ordinating centre enquired as to how SW DeNDRoN had been supporting a local site which was struggling to reach the recruitment target for a clinical trial. The CSO was able to produce the tool which demonstrated all the recruitment strategies that the CSO had used at the site. The CSO was thanked for all their efforts in assisting with recruitment.

PATIENTS IN RESEARCH

Tips

- Involve as many clinical studies officers and research nurses from various research networks at the start to ensure a comprehensive list of recruitment methods is obtained

- Be clear from the beginning what your aims are and plan your outcome measures accordingly

- Trial the tool on different studies (i.e. RCTs/observational)

- Think about how this tool might be best used to benefit your practice - whether it be completing it on a monthly basis or using it to develop the recruitment plan at the beginning of the study and then evaluating these methods at certain time points

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