

Messaging through text: Launching a pioneering text messaging service with GPs

The implementation of a Join Dementia Research Project Manager in the Clinical Research Network (CRN) East Midlands has seen a number of pilot schemes being trialled with success. The new role has been developed to support and promote Join Dementia Research within the region.

One particular initiative is to engage with Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) in GP practices to give them an overview of the Join Dementia Research service and the benefits it could have for patients in their practices. It was during a presentation in Derbyshire, that a PPG member suggested the idea of sending a text message out to all patients over 18 promoting Join Dementia Research at their practice.

Goizeder Aspe Juaristi, the Join Dementia Research Project Manager for the NIHR CRN East Midlands, could see immediate benefits in adopting this approach, "It would allow us to signpost to Join Dementia Research to a large number of people in a very efficient way. GP Practices in the East Midlands are already very engaged in promoting Join Dementia Research and have been very receptive to this innovative approach", she said.

"The message had to be kept short to fit within a text message and provide people with an overview of what it is and where they can go to find out more." Goiz added.

The first message was sent out to 6,724 patients at one GP practice:



"(XX GP Practice) supports an NHS service for anybody over the age of 18 to help beat dementia. For more information please visit www.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk"

Over the next few weeks, Join Dementia Research registrations in the area were monitored to evaluate the response. Unfortunately, there was no immediate impact, but Goiz felt it was worth testing further. "We monitored the Join Dementia Research uptake in the region, a significant increase was not seen but because of the positive response from GP Practices we decided that it was worth pursuing the approach. So we expanded to other GP Practices in the East Midlands".

129,038 Text Messages were sent by 30 GP Practices in the East Midlands

Region	Number of GP practices	Number of text messages sent
Nottinghamshire	11	53,630
Derbyshire	7	38,823
Lincolnshire	3	8,566
Leicestershire	8	21,358
Northamptonshire	1	6,661

Around 280 Join Dementia Research registrations were recorded. Goiz was pleased with the increase in registrations and that the initiative allowed the Join Dementia Research message to be disseminated in a very quick and efficient way. She also stressed an added benefit, "It also creates engagement with GP Practices potentially creating other collaborative opportunities".

"This initiative demonstrates how sharing the opportunity to take part in research with patients can be delivered quickly, and inexpensively using modern communication methods. We hope this work in East Midlands will inspire other parts of the nation to do the same."

Adam Smith, Programme Manager for the Office of the NIHR National Director for Dementia Research also noted: "450,000 people have a dementia diagnosis in England, following the diagnosis the majority of treatment and care is managed in primary care, delivered by GPs and practice staff in the community. When you also consider that much of today's research studies are looking for people with the very earliest signs of memory loss, or even just risk factors associated with dementia, it is obvious that GPs and primary care should be a major focus of promotion of Join Dementia Research".

"This initiative demonstrates how sharing the opportunity to take part in research with patients can be delivered quickly, and inexpensively using modern communication methods. We hope this work in East Midlands will inspire other parts of the nation to do the same, not just as a one-off but as an annual way of supporting and sharing the opportunity with patients", he added.

Top Tips

- Implementing a Join Dementia Research Project Manager has seen an uplift in activity and initiatives in the East Midlands. If there is not capacity for a sole Join Dementia Research position, it could become part of others' roles to concentrate on Join Dementia Research awareness.
- Ensure the local CRN are maintaining a positive relationship with GPs and other Primary Care staff in the local area. The more contact you have with them, the more opportunities and potential ideas you will come up with together.
- Before engaging in any marketing with patients, make sure you are aware of the GPs code of practice in terms of Information Governance and Confidentiality.
- Once you have come up with a message you would like to communicate, send it to the Join Dementia Research communications team and the Office of the NIHR National Director for Dementia Research team for feedback.
- Before you send out your text, put in place methods to track how successful it has been – even if it is just looking to see if there has been a spike in registrations in the area.

For more information visit:

nhs.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk