

## How Clinical Research has Helped Hill Top Care Home learn about its residents – and its staff

Kath Barcroft, the Manager of Hill Top Care Home in Stoke on Trent (pictured) is a convert to the benefits of taking part in clinical research.

‘Most people wouldn’t think that we could be doing research in a care home, but we have been doing it now for a couple of years and I would really recommend other care homes to get involved. It has really been a worthwhile experience - we have learnt so much about the needs of our patients and it helps to involve our residents’ families in their care as well as helping us to engage with them.



The home was approached about contributing to studies by Johanne Tomlinson, Research Nurse at Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent NHS Partnership Trust (SSOTP), who explained to the Hill Top team what would be involved. Janice Lovatt, one of three Research Facilitators at the Clinical Research Network: West Midlands (CRN: WM) worked in partnership with Johanne to include Hill Top in a network of homes that can be approached regarding any suitable studies. Kath comments: ‘It can’t be rushed and it can be quite time consuming, but it produces a lot of useful information and the staff, residents and their families really feel like they are making a contribution.’

The most recent study looks at quality of life for the residents and involves two care home staff helping residents with dementia (or their carers) to fill in questionnaires. Consent must be gained first and the research can be carried out face to face or over the phone. It has been designed so that with staff help, residents with non-verbal communication can also take part. Research nurses from SSOTP have visited Hill Top from their base at Haywood Hospital to carry out recruitment to the study and complete the questionnaires with patients. Jo says: ‘The staff at Hill Top have worked very flexibly with us to make sure we can carry out the research in a way which suits everyone. The support of the CRN and ENRICH has been invaluable.’

This study aims to develop training and intervention for care home staff to better manage agitation in residents with dementia. Residents agitated behaviour takes up staff time and emotional and physical energy but they do not always know how to respond. This study is one of the streams in an integrated programme to help support care homes in managing agitation in a variety of settings from domestic environments to end of life, therefore improving the residents’ quality of life.

Kath adds: 'The Network has been very supportive and helpful – they come as often as they can and they make sure they work around the routines of the home, so that there is no disruption to our residents.'

There are over 18,000 care homes in England providing homes and care for over 386,000 people. The ENRICH project aims to support increasing the amount of research from its current very low levels, in order to improve the quality of life and quality of care for all care home residents. The ENRICH Project was launched nationally in 2012 but the initiative was not taken up in the West Midlands until late 2014, when we had 1 care home signed up and little research activity.

Since starting in November 2014, the Clinical Research Network: West Midlands has recruited over 100 care homes and over 300 participants to care home research. The role of the three Network facilitators is to enable care homes to become research ready and active. They are making connections with local NHS Trusts, Care Home service providers and researchers in order to help facilitate them becoming active in research and helping them through the process, which for many will be the first time. The aim is that care homes build capability and capacity to involve their residents and family members, and staff in research, if they wish to.

Carly Craddock, Research Delivery Manager says: 'Local NHS Trusts have worked collaboratively with the CRN team in releasing their staff to be able to go in to their local care homes and inform staff, residents and their family members about specific research studies and sign people up to the research if they wish to take part. We are currently primarily looking at studies involving dementia but our main aim is to ensure care homes, residents and their family members are informed of all opportunities to access research that could benefit them now or others in the future.'

Janice Lovatt, ENRICH Research Facilitator says: 'The ENRICH Project is about expanding research into a new and research naive environment, laying the foundations for research readiness and developing a whole new research culture in care homes in the West Midlands. It also means that research studies that would usually focus on those accessing specialist services can now be offered to those residing in care homes, and who might not be in touch with these services at the current time.'

'We are working with a community that is unfamiliar with research, the benefits, what it means and how to engage in it. We are breaking down barriers that can mean lack of access to research studies and enabling access to relevant research. Helping to celebrate good practice and educate care homes in research that can affect not only residents, but staff morale and to develop new knowledge and skills along the way. We have identified the importance of equality of access to research for care home residents and staff where that can help shape and improve the quality of care, and the quality of lives of residents.'

The CRN has invested in and developed new part-time posts to help facilitate this initiative, enabling the care homes to speak to researchers and delivering a research advocate to all involved.

