

Engaging with non-research NHS care staff and managers : Research Champions Initiative in a Children's Research Unit

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This initiative was established to increase engagement between the clinical service and the children's research unit at the Great North Children's Hospital, to allow efficient delivery of research and improve quality of patient care. It was essential that staff were aware of the connection between research-active organisations and measuring a better patient outcome.

What was the initiative?

In early 2015, the children's research team identified that staff working within busy clinical areas often struggled to engage with research. An initiative was developed to identify research 'champions' in each of the clinical areas. It was hoped that these individuals would act as a link between the research unit and clinical areas, and would be able to communicate to the clinical team which studies are active, what they entail, and whether any additional teaching is required. The initiative also sought to build a research champions' 'community', to enable constant support and communication, and to hold regular meetings to ensure that everyone was able to stay involved. 'Research Boards' were also placed in each clinical area to provide further information and news on ongoing research studies within the organisation.

What was the outcome of the initiative?

As a result of the initiative, there is now a research champion in every clinical area in the children's hospital. Regular meetings are now held every six months (they were initially held monthly, but this proved unsustainable as busy schedules meant that attendance fell). The presence of research champions has improved overall engagement with research within the majority of clinical areas, and clinical staff are now much more likely to ask the champions about research and to open a dialogue with the research team. Staff also alert the champion or research team to any potential patient participants for active research studies. There is now a research board in every clinical area which keeps staff informed about ongoing studies. Furthermore, the Children's Hospital induction now has a regular slot about research, which is delivered either by a research champion or member of the research team. This is helping to embed research within the organisation at all levels.

What worked well?

The team gained the support of the Directorate management team before starting this initiative, to ensure the reception would be positive. Meetings were also organised with ward sisters to gain their support, and it helped that they could be reassured that management had already bought-in to the initiative. This early engagement on different levels was crucial to the success of the initiative.

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What were the challenges?

The needs of the clinical service will always remain the top priority, so it was often difficult for research champions to be released monthly for meetings. This was addressed by changing the frequency of the meetings.

What supporting resources were required?

The main resource was the time required away from the clinical areas for research champions, which has proven problematic at times. As mentioned previously, the frequency of meetings has been reduced, however informal conversations and email updates take place regularly outside of those meetings to ensure that everyone is kept up to date.