

How engagement and collaboration has generated enthusiasm for research in the West Midlands

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This case study illustrates how engagement and collaboration can generate enthusiasm for research, and empower organisations to embrace the changes required to become research active.

What was the Initiative?

In 2014 a 'Research Ready' pilot project between the Supportive & Palliative Care Research team of the West Midlands Clinical Research Network and St. Richard's Hospice, Worcester was developed and undertaken. The project was a collaboration between the two organisations, both of whom could see the advantages to and the necessity of the hospice and palliative care community becoming research active. Mutually agreed objectives, stating that both parties would establish the hospice as a research ready and active organisation, were completed over a 12 month period culminating in the hospice being selected to take part in and successfully complete its first NIHR portfolio study.

What was the outcome of the initiative?

The project empowered St Richard's Hospice to become 'research active' to levels one and two of the 'Research Framework for Hospices'¹. More than this, the project facilitated a collaboration between organisations that had previously had little understanding of each others' research governance process, and there were very clear mutual benefits. For example, the hospice became more confident in its ability to offer research participation safely to its clients, and the network became more confident about how to support non-NHS organisations to deliver safe research.

What were the benefits of the initiative?

Some of the benefits for the hospice were identified by staff participants:

- 'Being research active is seen as a quality marker'
- The initiative led to 'greater engagement with higher education institutions'
- 'The experience has been excellent for morale and staff development'
- 'Research active institutions give better care and we want to be part of contributing to advancements in the field.'
- The initiative has provoked 'interest and opportunity to develop the research infrastructure' of the organisation
- 'Now is a good time to start' carrying out research studies due to 'support from the NIHR Clinical Research Network'.

The Clinical Research Network discovered new ways of working, started to develop its own model of support for non-NHS organisations and was able to access a previously unused research population.

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What worked particularly well?

Through open and honest communication the two organisations set objectives that would develop the research culture and the necessary research governance framework to become a 'research ready' organisation. Substantial information sharing and exploration of existing resources was undertaken, including the help and support of other research active hospices, and research management and governance staff within the local network.

What challenges were encountered?

At the time the main challenge was the distinct lack of knowledge and experience with regards to undertaking research in non-NHS hospices, plus an absence of any national steer.

Clinical commitments and patient care will always take priority and can sometimes hinder progress, so dedicated research time for a member of the hospice staff was a real necessity.

Whilst there was some concern that the hospice may not be insured to undertake research, early discussions with the insurers proved that this was not the case although each research study will need to be re-assessed on a study by study basis.

What was the outcome of the initiative?

St. Richard's Hospice produced a report for the research network outlining the project's impact. As well as successfully enabling the hospice to become a research ready and active organisation, the project has, "generated a structure and a momentum for research within the hospice which it will build on in the future". The two organisations continue to support and learn from each other and this positive relationship has opened the doors to other hospices in the region who have now become involved in a similar collaboration.

The support of the hospice's Council of Governors and senior management team, the dedication of the appointed research lead, the genuine intrigue and enthusiasm of hospice staff coupled with the dedicated resource provided by the research network made this project a success, and will continue to do so.

What supporting resources were required?

The Supportive and Palliative Care research team submitted a bid to the Clinical Research Network for money that was intended to support 'new and innovative uses of funding to enhance the delivery of research'. The successful bid agreed to fund some protected research time for the appointed research lead at the hospice and to provide the support of a senior research nurse to deliver a planned programme of research delivery mentorship over a 12-18 month period.