

Increasing our primary care research activity – a Practice Manager’s perspective

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Posted 24th June 2020

In the last year great effort has been made by practices across West Yorkshire and Harrogate to provide primary care research opportunities in less research active areas. This month, Nick Gwatkin of Blackburn Road Medical Centre in Batley reflects upon the work the practice is doing to open up research opportunities in North Kirklees. If you would like support or advice about research activity in your practice please get in touch with a member of [our team](#).

In the year 2019-20, our practice participated in 3 National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) portfolio studies which recruited 19 people into primary care research. This is a marked increase in research activity at our practice compared with previous years. Here are some thoughts about the experience:

What motivated us to increase our research activity?

There are a number of factors that came together in the decision.

There is an increase in patient awareness and a squeeze on (postcode lottery) resources available. This combination of reducing availability and patient awareness of what treatments were possible combined so that patients were more keen to get involved in research to gain access to more treatments. Equally, there is a wish to be involved so that good medical practice can evolve by assisting with the introduction of new treatments; if general practice doesn't become involved, then who?

In terms of demonstrating a dynamic working environment it is an addition and diversion from the norm. This works (hopefully) in introducing an unusual element in the salaried GPs' working week, making their week more varied/diverse.

It also allows us to demonstrate breadth and depth of medical interaction during any CQC inspection.

The income factor was a minor driver; any payment is relatively small.

What factors enabled us to increase our research activity?

The team – having the correct individuals that are interested and have capacity. It also adds in an appraisal element and linked rewards.

What challenges did we face?

There is significant information provided, but this volume of information is itself a challenge. An assurance assessment on commencement would go some way to providing reassurance (to both parties) that a practice has 'hit the mark'. This has been raised with West Yorkshire Research and Development, and they are looking into what might be appropriate. In any case, the team say they would welcome any questions or concerns from individual practices at any point in the research process.

What have been the benefits from increased research activity?

Patient involvement - it has engaged those that have participated and allowed them to feel that they have been an active participant in their treatment whilst also adding value to the system. The additional patient time and GP interaction allows for an improved GP/Patient experience than the norm.

What are our plans for future involvement in research?

We are continuing to gain experience and want to look to expand the offering.

What would we recommend to other practices who are thinking about becoming involved in research?

There needs to be a single lead (not the practice manager). Individual ownership vested in an individual who you want to keep, where there is no obvious route for promotion, is an ideal candidate.

Attention to detail, confidence, a willingness to ask questions and to act independently – these are all good qualities we wish to retain in general practice and they can be developed within this role.

Start small.