

### The Development Of A Research Strategy For East And North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

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#### Summary

This paper summarises why it is important for NHS Trusts to be research active, describes the development of a Research Strategy for the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and provides advice to NHS staff that would like to increase their contribution to the development of research at the Trust.

#### Why It Is Important For NHS Trusts To Be Research Active?

A research-active culture can bring a host of benefits for patients, clinicians and the NHS, driving innovation, giving rise to better and more cost-effective treatments, and creating opportunities for staff development. Growing evidence supports this:

- Research-active Trusts appear to do better in overall performance.<sup>1</sup>
- Patients first seen at a hospital with a keen interest in clinical trials are more likely to receive chemotherapy, and chemotherapy is associated with improved survival.<sup>2</sup>
- Academic output correlates with better mortality rates.<sup>3</sup>
- Treatment of patients in clinical trials is associated with considerable cost savings.<sup>4</sup>

There is also a national perspective as the NHS Constitution<sup>5</sup> commits to the promotion and conduct of research to improve the current and future health and care of the population.

The Department of Health has created the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)<sup>6</sup> which has a vision “*To improve the health and wealth of the nation through research*”. The NIHR aims to:

- Establish the NHS as an internationally recognised centre of research excellence.
- Attract, develop & retain the best research professionals to conduct people-based research.
- Commission research focused on improving health and social care.

- Strengthen and streamline systems for research management and governance.
- Increase opportunities for patients and the public to participate in, and benefit from, research.
- Promote and protect the interests of patients and the public in health research.
- Drive faster translation of scientific discoveries into tangible benefits for patients.
- Maximise the research potential of the NHS to contribute to the economic growth of the country through the life sciences industry.
- Act as sound custodians of public money for the public good.

The Health Research Authority (HRA)<sup>7</sup> protects and promotes the interests of patients and the public in health and social care research. The HRA and the UK Health Departments via the draft UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research<sup>8</sup> are committed to an environment where:

- Patients, service users and the public are given, and take, the opportunity to participate in health and social care research, and are confident about doing so.
- New treatments, care and other services are developed through ethical and scientifically sound research for the benefit of patients, service users and the public.
- Applying to do research is simple and getting a decision is quick and predictable.
- Researchers find it straightforward to do high-quality, ethical research.
- Commissioners and Providers of health and social care appreciate how health and social care research benefits patients, service users, staff and the public.
- Industry sees the UK as a great place to do health and social care research.
- Money from charities and other research funders goes into carrying out research, not into navigating needless bureaucracy or duplicating previous work.

- Research projects get registered, the data and tissue they collect can be made available for future analysis, where appropriate and with adequate consent and safeguards, and research findings get published and summarised for those who took part in them.

There are also other NHS policy frameworks and guidelines which place a duty on NHS Trusts to protect and exploit innovation / intellectual property for the benefit of patients and the wider health care community.

### **The Development, Implementation And Monitoring Of A Research Strategy For The East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust**

The East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust has a vision “*to be amongst the best*”. An important element of this is the recognition that research is important because it enhances patient outcome and experience and it is a national imperative.

Research is fully supported by the Trust’s Board. The Medical Director has a specific responsibility for research. Within the Trust, Research and Development is established as it’s own Division, has an Associate Director of Research and is supported by two clinical leads for Research, a Lead Research Nurse, a Research Manager, a Finance Manager, two Pharmacists and over 100 research delivery staff. There is an R&D Board which meets quarterly and a Research and Development Steering Group which meets monthly.

The Trust has a long history of being research active with particular strengths in Cancer, Renal, Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes and growing areas such as Robotic Surgery and Ear Nose and Throat. The research activity is a mixture of studies which staff have gained though external funding via grants, studies that are commercially-funded, non-commercial studies that the Trust act as a participating site and studies that support the training and development of staff (e.g. MSc, MD, PhD, Research Fellows). A high proportion of these studies are adopted to the NIHR Portfolio.

The Trust is a Partner Organisation to the NIHR Clinical Research Network and is located in the Eastern Region<sup>9</sup> and works closely with the Eastern Academic Health Science Network.<sup>10</sup> The Trust also accesses NIHR support via the Research Design Service<sup>11</sup> and the Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care<sup>12</sup> as well as a number of local Universities.<sup>13-17</sup>

Over the last five years there has been a considerable change in the way that research is designed and funded in the NHS. In brief the current funding models require Trusts to support studies that recruit a large number of patients and for a high proportion of research to be commercially-funded. This has resulted in the need for a change of strategy; maintain studies that are interventional, increase research participation via an increase in observational studies, introduce more robust feasibility so that the studies that are supported can be delivered to time and target, and also to increase the number of commercially-funded research. This will ensure that the Trust is amongst the best in delivering research to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research.

A number of exercises were carried out to identify the particular strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the Trust. The following considerations were thought to be important:

- Patients have a strong desire to help shape and to support the implementation of the research strategy.
- The Trust has a track record of research excellence in some clinical areas and has potential for growth via the awarding of external non-commercial research grants and through being innovative.
- The Trust serves a population which is large and has historically supported little research when compared to populations around nearby Cambridge and London so there is a scope to increase research activity.
- The Trust is located in close proximity to a large Healthcare Industry around Stevenage, the M11, Cambridge and London. There is considerable potential for growth in this commercial sector.
- The Trust has excellent relationships with a number of Universities and these could be strengthened by establishing more formal organisation links.
- Historically the Trust has chosen to mainly support research that requires a lot of resources and manpower. This has meant that activity, as measured by number of patients into research per unit of resource has been lower than other organisations who have chosen to support less intensive studies.
- The Trust has a Research Office that offers a single point of contact for all research matters, works to internal procedures and manages a large and well-trained research workforce.

The Research Strategy was developed through extensive consultation. Numerous internal and external stakeholder meetings were held and this was supplemented by an internal and then an external survey to raise awareness and gain further feedback. The web-based surveys received a total 499 responses, broken down as follows: 292 staff, 104 Patients/Members of the Public, 40 University

staff, 42 people from other NHS organisations including various NHS Commissioners and 17 other including Industry, Department of Health and NHS England. A total of four respondents declined to say which category they belonged to. The feedback showed a high level of support for each theme (Table 1).

| Research Themes And Percentage Of Respondents Who Agreed With Each Statement   |     |
|--|-----|
| • The Trust's vision is 'to be amongst the best' - incorporating research into our core business purpose and objectives and into routine patient care is an important part of this.                            | 90% |
| • We should engage with patients and aspire to provide opportunities for all patients to participate in research.  | 94% |
| • We should introduce a practical way of taking 'consent to contact' so we can develop a database of patients who would like to be involved in future research studies.  | 88% |
| • We should improve research information and opportunities, to increase levels of research awareness and participation for all staff.  | 95% |
| • We have a duty to seek funding for research from all available sources as well as from the National Institute for Health Research - including from commercial funders and research grant providers.          | 89% |
| • There are some simple steps we can take to increase research activity, e.g. increasing the number of high-recruiting studies, removing unnecessary bureaucracy, creating protected research time.            | 90% |
| • For our research strategy to succeed we need to recognise that we are part of a wider system of healthcare, academia and industry and that we have to work together to deliver research for patient benefit. | 95% |
| • We know that individuals are the drivers of innovation and research success. We need to improve the way we recognise and reward staff who play their part in this.   | 85% |
| • For research to be really effective it needs to be underpinned by well-trained staff working to Standard Operating Procedures, and supported by a well-resourced Research Office.                            | 94% |

**Table 1:** Feedback showing high level of support for each theme

The internal engagement exercise asked what kind of barriers there were to research and the following responses were received:

- Lack of time (n=127).
- Lack of awareness of research opportunities (n=96).
- Lack of funding (n=76).
- Lack of support from within or outside of my team or department (n=55).
- Lack of access to support from Research Nurses (n=31).

## Research & Development

In addition the engagement exercise received numerous offers of support, including from the public and patients, in relation to:

- Contributing to various research workgroups that will be developed as part of the strategy (n=109).
- Sharing links with other organisations or charities that may help us with our research programme (n=63).
- Contributing to a Patient Group who looks at how research can be delivered at a practical level at the Trust (n=49).
- Contributing to a Patient Group that looks at research priorities at the Trust (n=43).

- Working as a lay advisor to ensure that our website and other communications are easy to read and can be understood (n=33).
- Sharing experience to help others e.g. becoming a Research Mentor or Buddy (n=30).
- Becoming a Patient Ambassador who advocates Research (n=23).

Taking into account the national and local context, the detailed SWOT analysis and the feedback from a variety of engagement events the Trust's three year Strategy was formed around the following vision and aims (Table 2). A large number of enabling activities underpin each aim.

| Research Vision | <i>Enhancing Patient Experience And Outcome Through Research Opportunity And Innovation For All Patients And All Staff</i> |  |   |  |  |
|-----------------|--|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Aims</b>     | The Trust to be an internationally recognised centre of excellence for research and patient outcome                        | Patients and public to be engaged with, participate in, and benefit from research and innovation | Research is funded via external grant applications, from Industry and with the support of Charities | Research is embedded into the planning and delivery of routine patient care for all patients | Research is well governed, managed and supported so studies are delivered, as promised |

**Table 2:** Research vision and aims

So that the implementation of the research strategy can be measured a 'Talent Map' exercise, which can be applied to all levels in the organisation, was developed (Table 3). This approach provides an opportunity to assess our current research culture, to work out ways to improve it and it also provides a tool to measure improvement.

| Increasing Indication Of Research Excellence Across The Trust At All Levels | Individual | Research Group | Department | Division | Trust |
|---|------------|----------------|------------|----------|-------|
| Has potential   |            |                |            |          |       |
| Some evidence   |            |                |            |          |       |
| Good  |            |                |            |          |       |
| Amongst the Best  |            |                |            |          |       |
| Exemplar  |            |                |            |          |       |

**Table 3:** Talent map to measure and improve research excellence

## Research & Development

An R&D Board will provide oversight to the implementation of the Research Strategy via quarterly meetings and the Trust's Board will review progress on a six monthly basis. Detailed Business Plans will be produced that identify yearly objectives, goals and describe how the implementation of the strategy will be measured, monitored and managed. This will include an analysis of the market potential and prioritisation of activities which frame the strategy.

In order to prioritise 2016/17 activities, all research delivery staff were invited to meet, discuss and agree the priorities and practical steps for the first 12 months. The following were identified as being important from an operational perspective:

- Continue ground breaking research for patient benefit.
- Patient engagement to increase research activity.
- Incorporate 'Research' into Trust business planning.
- Staff training, appraisal and personal development plans.

- Support studies which contribute to our Research Strategy.
- Flexible working by staff to support studies.
- Increase recruitment to NIHR studies by 20%.
- Deliver commercial research and increase income by 20%.
- Increase the number of research grants; increase capacity of the Trust to act as Research Sponsor.
- Continued regulatory compliance.

### Advice To NHS Staff That Would Like To Become Research Active

An important aspect of the Research Strategy is to enable individuals to take part in research. Using the Talent map to measure and improve research excellence provided in Table 3 the following ways are suggested. This provides indicative goals for the development of individuals and similar indicators are in development for Research Groups, Departments, Division and the Trust as a whole.

| Increasing Indication Of Research Excellence | Indicators Of Research Activity  |
|--|--|
| Has potential                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in Journal clubs</li> <li>• Competent in critical appraisal</li> <li>• Active in evidence-based service development</li> </ul>  |
| Some evidence                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained in Good Clinical Practice</li> <li>• Supports delivery of Research Studies</li> <li>• Authorship of research publications</li> </ul>  |
| Good   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal Investigator on NIHR Portfolio and or commercial research studies</li> <li>• Chief Investigator on NIHR Portfolio observational research</li> <li>• Gained external grant funding</li> </ul>                        |
| Amongst the Best                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Investigator on NIHR Portfolio and or commercially-funded interventional research</li> <li>• Gained external grant funding as part of a national team</li> <li>• Recognised national role as research leader</li> </ul> |
| Exemplar                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gained external grant funding as part of an international team</li> <li>• Recognised international role as research leader</li> <li>• Significant research income via grants / commercial studies</li> </ul>                  |

Help, advice and support is available via the Trust's Research and Development Department which has offices at Lister Hospital and Mount Vernon Cancer Centre and can be contacted via [researchanddevelopment.enh-tr@nhs.net](mailto:researchanddevelopment.enh-tr@nhs.net) or via the Trust's switchboard 01438 314333.

### Summary

1. This paper has provided a brief overview of the evidence base indicating that research-active Trusts provide better patient care.
2. The approach taken by East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust to develop a Research Strategy is described. This is based on:
  - a. An analysis of the Trust's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
  - b. An extensive engagement and consultation exercise involving staff, patients, the public and other stakeholders.
  - c. The incorporation of research into the everyday planning of the Trust.
  - d. The development of systems to measure and manage the implementation of the strategy at the level of individuals, research groups, departments, divisions and at the Trust as a whole.
3. An example of how individuals can contribute to the research culture is provided.

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