The Clinical Research Nurse workforce – an insight into the national organisational structure.

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Background
Background – Where did it all start?

Development of the Clinical Research Nurse (CRN) role since the late 1980’s.

Increasing research governance

NHS Cancer Plan 2000 led to set up of National Cancer Research Network

Increase in national research infrastructure following DH report “Best Research for Best Health” (2006)

• Set up of the NIHR
• Roll out of topic specific networks
• Funding for Clinical Research Facilities
• Funding and structure of Biomedical Research Centres / Units.

Growth of NIHR portfolio led to increase in funding available.

Increase in CRN posts and beginning of the emergence of non nursing roles
Situation in 2012

Known large increase in the size of the CRN workforce.

Limited empirical data on workforce size and structure:

• MacArthur and Hill (2006)
• Ledger (2008)
• Coulson and Grange (2012)

Small number of unpublished workforce reviews:

• Simpson (2006)
• Carrick – Sen (2007)
• Edwards (2008)

Anecdotal articles speculating on workforce size:

• Pidd and O’Neill (2011) – “conservative estimate anticipates a UK wide workforce of around 10,000 by 2013”.
Overall research questions

• How is the CRN workforce currently organised within NHS Acute trusts?

• What is the experience of CRNs working within acute NHS hospital trusts?

• What is the most effective way to structure the CRN workforce?
Method
Methodology

- Used a pragmatic mixed methods approach.
- Pragmatism allows the researcher to use a combination of whichever methods are needed to find answers to the research questions.
- Instead of focusing on methods, researchers initially emphasise the research question and then use all approaches available to understand the issues within it (Morgan 2007).
- For mixed methods researchers, pragmatism opens the doors to use of multiple methods, different worldviews and different assumptions gained from different forms of data collection (Cresswell 2009).
- A pragmatic approach enabled the researcher to initially consider the research questions to be explored. This then led to the use of a variety of data collection methods in order to gain a broader understanding of the issues being explored.
What did I do?

2 Phase study:

Phase 1: National Survey

• To gain an overview of the current CRN workforce and the teams within which they are based.
• To identify which organisations have reviewed their CRN workforce and what form this has taken.

Phase 2: Case Study of 4 organisations

• To explore and compare the experience of CRNs within different organisations using a quality framework.
• To explore the experience and perception of senior research staff (R&D Directors, Lead CRN and PI’s concerning the CRN workforce)
• To further examine the workforce structure currently in place.
What did I do?

National survey of UK CRN workforce.

Planned survey to send to Lead CRN across the UK.

Planned participants (n = 177):

- 161 Acute NHS Trusts
- 14 Scottish Health Boards
- 1 organisation each in Wales and Northern Ireland

Developed survey using framework which identifies the 6 challenges of Quality Improvement

Piloted with Network Managers in December 2013 prior to re structure of national network infrastructure

Aimed to send to Lead CRN in each organisation or the individual responsible for the CRN workforce.

Survey ran from April to July 2015
Educational
establishing and nurturing a learning process to support continual improvement

Physical & Technological
infrastructure and technologies supportive of improvement and quality of care

Structural
structuring, planning and co-ordinating the improvement effort

Political
negotiating the buy-in, conflict, opposition, and other politics of change

Cultural
giving ‘quality’ a shared, collective meaning, value and significance

Emotional
energising, mobilising, and inspiring people to join in the improvement effort
Results
## Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Trust</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Total sent survey</th>
<th>Number of replies received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Acute</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16 (14.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Acute</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26 (23.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Acute</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS Scottish Health Boards</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales &amp; Northern Ireland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>173</strong></td>
<td><strong>144</strong></td>
<td><strong>111 (77%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses
Results

- An inconsistent workforce structure, both nationally and within organisations, was identified.
- Organisations had a range of different workforce structures in place to support their CRN workforce.
- For the majority of organisations, the structure had evolved in a reactive manner in response to local and national influences.
- The CRN workforce is mainly comprised of band 6 and band 7 research nurses with 50% (55/111) organisations having band 5 research nurse posts.
- 53% (59/111) organisations had reviewed their workforce to further improve recruitment of which 25% (15/59) had subsequently re-structured.
- Smaller organisations favoured a generic workforce covering many clinical areas.
- The case study phase demonstrated that for many organisations, the oncology CRN workforce was managed separately from the remainder of the CRN workforce.
Is your CRN workforce embedded in a defined structure?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent (Count)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RN workforce works as part of the Local Research Networks or within one of the divisions.</td>
<td>86% (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation has one or more Clinical Research Facilities (CRFs)</td>
<td>34% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation is part of the Network of Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMC)</td>
<td>16.5% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation has been assigned as one of the NIHR Biomedical Research Units</td>
<td>10.5% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation is part of an Allied Health Sciences Centre</td>
<td>10.5% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation has been assigned as one of the NIHR Biomedical Research Centres</td>
<td>9.5% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered question (Skipped question)</td>
<td>85 (26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CRN team structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Proportion of response (count)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working directly with Consultants on their research studies</td>
<td>63.5% (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a structured research team within one clinical area</td>
<td>55% (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within clinical teams with non-research colleagues</td>
<td>51% (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within a Clinical Research Facility</td>
<td>40% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in one area in different research teams</td>
<td>38% (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working independently in one or more clinical teams but not within a research or clinical team</td>
<td>21% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>30.5% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered question <em>(skipped)</em></td>
<td>82 (29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Structure**

**Banding level of CRN workforce**

- Band 5
- Band 6 (highest percentage)
- Band 7
- Band 8a
- Band 8b
- Band 8c
- Band 9
- University grade 5
- University grade 6
- University grade 7

Percentage distribution:

- 0%
- 10%
- 20%
- 30%
- 40%
- 50%
- 60%
- 70%
- 80%
- 90%
- 100%
Roles Within Research Teams

- Research Nurse
- Senior Research Nurse
- Research Pharmacist
- Clinical Trial Co-ordinator
- Data Manager
- Research Assistant
- Other
- Laboratory Assistant
- Research Health Care Assistant
- Research Facility Manager
- Quality Assurance Manager
- Research Matron
- Research Phlebotomist
Research Nurse workforce structures

Trust

- Band 7 Oncology RN
- Band 7 Lead CRN
- Cancer clinical trials team
  - 5 CRNs
  - 2 Support roles
- Cross-clinical Generic Team
  - 8 CRNs

Trust

- Band 8a Lead CRN
- Band 8a Research Matron
- Cancer clinical trials team
  - 24 Roles
- Clinical Research Facility
  - 36 Roles
- Based within clinical subdivisions
- Cross clinical teams
- Clinical Research Network CRNs
- Cancer
- Neonatal

Trust

- Operations Manager
- Divisional Research Manager
- Band 8a Lead CRN
- Haematology & Oncology
  - 50 Roles
- Biomedical Research Unit
  - 17 Research Roles
- R&D Team
  - 7 Nurses
  - 3 Practitioners
- Cross-Clinical CRN Teams
  - Working across clinical areas
- Emergency department & critical care
- Renal
- Paediatric

Trust

- Band 8a Lead CRN
- Oncology & Haematology
  - 7 CRNs
  - 2 Support roles
- Cross-clinical Research Team
  - 16 CRNs working across clinical areas

University

- Cancer clinical trials team
  - 24 Roles
- TRG
  - 3 roles
- NIHR
  - 5 roles

Examples

- Clinical Research Facility
- Clinical Research Network CRNs
- Cancer
- Neonatal

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NHS Foundation Trust
Recommendations and Conclusion
Conclusion

- Study provides the first ever national overview of the CRN workforce.
- It identifies the reactive and inconsistent nature of its growth in response to external and internal influences.
- This dedicated nursing workforce is crucial to support ongoing progress in future research delivery so ensuring continued patient safety.
- Study can be used as the foundation for further in-depth analysis of this workforce to develop a more consistent structure and so support NIHR objectives and ongoing developments in evidence based care.
- Has identified some important attributes of a potential research nurse workforce structure.
**ROLE STRUCTURE**

**STRUCUTURE**
1. Oversight of trust wide CRN workforce (cancer and non-cancer).
2. Responsible for strategic oversight and direction of workforce.
3. Involvement with trust wide policies/ SOPs for running of research studies.
4. Responsibilities include autonomy to develop the vision, ideas and strategies for the benefit of the CRN workforce.
5. Links with national groups, e.g., Lead CRN group.

**REPORTING LINES TO LEAD CRN**

**STRUCTURE**
1. Support structure in place to support CRN workforce. Level depends on size of workforce and banding of Lead CRN.
2. Structured management format across all bands of CRNs to ensure that Lead CRN has oversight & awareness of workforce.

**ROLE REQUIREMENTS**

**POLITICS**
1. Experienced in CRN role
2. Masters qualified (ideally MRes) with personal interest in academic development ideally with plans to pursue PhD
3. Proven track record of clinical leadership.
4. In-depth understanding of national research infrastructure & governance requirements.

**RESEARCH DELIVERY**

**POLITICS**
1. To ensure that NHRI portfolio studies have the appropriate CRN support to ensure delivery of NHRI recruitment objectives.
2. Support oversight & monitoring of NHRI recruitment targets.

**CLINICAL NURSING LINKS**

**CULTURE / EMOTIONAL**
1. Attendance at trust wide senior nursing meetings to ensure CRN workforce remains in line with nursing and trust processes.
2. Links with clinical nurses at an equal level to provide peer support and professional discussion of workforce issues.
3. Ensure continual, interactive dialogue between research & clinical nurses.

**RESEARCH AWARENESS**

**CULTURE**
1. Lead on projects to raise awareness of research across the organisation, for example, teaching sessions.
2. Involvement and engagement with trust wide initiatives.

**ORGANISATION INFRASTRUCTURE**

**TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE**
1. Ensure CRN workforce and research linked in with trust wide initiatives, e.g., IT changes.

**EDUCATIONAL ROLE**

**EDUCATION**
1. Formal oversight of education support of CRN workforce.
2. Access and awareness of external funding sources and personal budget to support education of workforce.
3. Links into higher education institutions.
4. Links into organisation wide education and training.
5. Consider development of Educator role if larger CRN workforce size.

**LEAD CRN POST**

Band 8 level - exact banding depends on size of workforce.
References


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