

Introduction of a junior research nurse fellow role to integrate clinical research activity amongst front-line research naïve staff

Dr Jennie Walker, Divisional Lead Nurse for Research & Innovation, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust; Karen Asher, Divisional Research & Innovation Manager, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust; Sam Jones, Head of Research Delivery, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust; Nicola Hall, Divisional Lead Research Nurse, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust; Karen Pearson, Research Delivery Manager, NIHR Clinical Research Network: East Midlands

 jennie.walker@nuh.nhs.uk

 @JennieW14

Background

It is a professional expectation that health practitioners actively contribute to their discipline's body of knowledge, however many find it difficult to prioritise research involvement given the demands of direct patient care (King et al 2018). Despite the fact that research is an essential component of evidence-based practice and clinical effectiveness, it is not commonplace for ward-based nurses to engage with and undertake research within their daily clinical practice. Reasons for not engaging in clinical research are commonly cited as lack of time, lack of knowledge and lack of support (Scala et al 2016). Given the challenges of limited staff and resources a novel approach was devised to empower front-line nurses to engage in research activity.

Approach

A bespoke programme was devised 0.2wte over six months to provide training and insight in to the clinical research process and the role of the research nurse. The aim of the programme was to develop the knowledge, skills and research networks of research naïve nurses working clinically at a large acute inner-city hospital Trust.

Training activities included:

- GCP training
- Insight visits to research facilities and clinical laboratories
- Shadowing experienced research teams
- Exposure to different stages of study set up and delivery
- Regular supervision from clinical and research practitioners
- Working towards the NIHR research competency framework (Figures 1 & 2).

As confidence progressed fellows were allocated a portfolio of studies within their usual clinical setting. This facilitated development of research skills and assisted with the dissemination of information to clinical teams regarding forthcoming and actively recruiting studies in the locality.

Impact

Three nurses were appointed to and completed the initial programme April-October 2018. Preliminary evaluations at six months identified an increased awareness of research studies within the areas where the fellows were based (40.6%). Two of the fellows extended the opportunity for an additional six-months (0.2 wte) to further advance their research skills. Competencies were assessed at 12 months by a senior research nurse (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Competencies achieved at 12 months

Background to clinical research	Study set-up	Study conduct	Data management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1A - Level 2 • 1B - Level 4 • 1C - Level 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2A - Level 2 • 2B - Level 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3A - Level 2 • 3B - Level 3 • 3C - Level 3 • 3D - Level 3 • 3E - Level 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4A - Level 3 • 4B - Level 2 • 4C - Level 2 • 4D - Level 1 • 4E - Level 1 • 4F - Level 2

Challenges: Although one day/week provided a useful insight to clinical research, a continuous block of time may have allowed the fellows to further immerse themselves in the research setting and develop knowledge, skills and confidence at a quicker pace.

Summary

The junior research nurse fellow programme was developed to provide a structured opportunity for front-line nurses to engage with clinical research. Overall, the programme successfully developed the knowledge and skills of research naïve nurses and has inspired them to consider how research can be integrated as part of their clinical roles. This opportunity has raised the profile of research in the clinical areas and highlighted different ways in which nurses can support research. Other notable successes include an increased awareness of the wider clinical team regarding the studies available across the clinical speciality and an increased confidence to engage with research.

Acknowledgements:

East Midlands Clinical Research Network (CRN) for funding the initial 6 months of the fellowship posts
Kate Marks, Melissa Shaw and Flavia Mastrolorenzi for their hard work and determination as junior research nurse fellows

References:

King L, Zlatanovic T, Gillham D. (2018) Challenges and facilitators for health practitioners and academics engaging in collaborative research and publication: A systematic review. *International Journal of Health Studies* 5(1) 121–145.
NIHR (2018) *Research competency framework*. National Institute of Health Research
Scala E, Price C, Day J. (2016) An integrative review of engaging clinical nurses in nursing research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*; 48 (4): 423–430

Figure 1: NIHR clinical competency themes

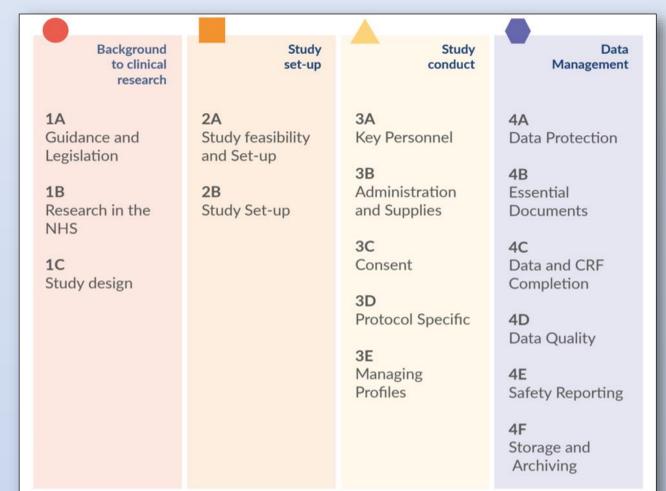
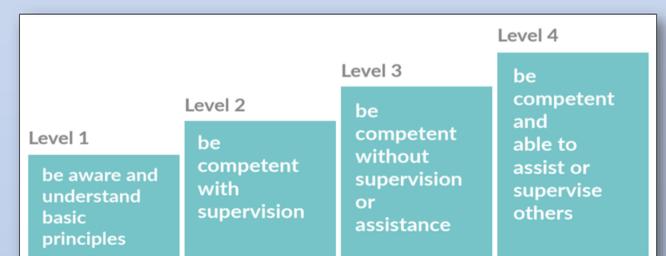


Figure 2: NIHR competency levels



Thematic analysis of evaluations identified the key benefits of this role as:

- Raising the profile of research within the clinical areas
- Increasing awareness of the research opportunities available for nurses
- Increasing staff confidence to engage in clinical research

"...has helped shape and change the way we work, keeping our patients safe and helping the staff to understand why we do things..." Manager A

The junior research nurse fellows identified the key areas of learning as:

- Understanding the importance of research
- Seeing the benefit for patients taking part in research and how it can improve patient experience
- Gaining insight to how research is undertaken
- Learning about study set up and the people/processes involved