

## Development of the NIHR CLAHRC West Health Systems Panel – providing public and patient involvement to research projects with a generic health focus

### Background

CLAHRC West have undertaken and continue to work on several research projects that relate to health generically rather than a particular condition or disease. Such projects can also involve a focus on changes in the way that health services are delivered and commissioned. In these situations it is more of a challenge to incorporate a public involvement perspective on the research process for several reasons:

- There does not tend to be a 'natural' patient or service user group or community from which public contributors can be recruited. Instead the focus is more general, and so it is more of a challenge to identify who to involve.
- Changes to how services are delivered that are being trialled or at a system level are not necessarily visible to patients. For example, this might include changes to staff working practices about how information is recorded in a hospital.

Despite these challenges, we recognise that these areas of research and evaluation can still benefit from public involvement.

### The solution

CLAHRC West developed a plan for a 'health systems panel' which could provide public involvement input into research with a generic health focus or health system focus. The idea was to find about 6 members who would be recruited by advertising through well-established channels, i.e. People in Health West of England's newsletter. The remit for recruiting to the panel was wide with an aim to attract a diverse range of people, some of whom would ideally have had knowledge and/or experience of health care or public service organisations.

### Recruiting the panel

Advertisements went out towards the end of 2016 to recruit for the Health Systems Panel and an induction and selection meeting was held in February 2017. 14 people attended along with 4 members of CLAHRC West staff (Sabi Redwood, Jon Banks, Niamh Redmond and Rosie Davies). We explained what CLAHRC West is and the kind of research we do, and described one or two of the generic research projects that the panel might work on. This included a panel discussion to generate feedback which gave the group a sense of what it would be like to contribute to the panel.

The generic projects we described included: an evaluation of the National Early Warning Score in pre-hospital care; a streaming service at the University Hospital Bristol Emergency Department to enable some patients to be assessed and treated by nurse practitioners; and the evaluation of an Emergency Department checklist being used throughout the West of England.

There was a lively debate which gave us an insight into what members of the public could bring to our research process. As we were developing a number of projects on more generic health and service delivery issues, as a result of this meeting we took a decision to recruit most of those who had attended. We felt having a larger panel would allow us to work with members as a shared resource which would increase our involvement capacity, and be called upon when needed, both face to face, and electronically via email.

## Convening the panel

The panel has met three of times in 2017 to discuss NIHR CLAHRC West research projects. Most notably the evaluations of the National Early Warning Score and the Emergency Department Checklist. These are both tools for health professionals that are not used directly with patients. Panel members have been shown data from the projects, usually quotes from clinician interviews and asked to comment on the issues raised and give their interpretation of the data. This gave us feedback on our initial interpretation of data but also a fresh perspective. For example, with the NEWS project the panel raised and discussed the idea of patients knowing about the checklist and even taking their own NEWS scores.

As well as providing feedback at panel meetings, the members have been an excellent resource when rapid feedback has been required while we are developing funding bids. This has usually been done by email. For example, recently a team submitted a funding application to NIHR Public Health (PHR) to evaluate the health benefits of shared community e-bikes. The panel members gave input on the age range of participants that we should be using, the type of setting that would work for a feasibility study and the type of physical tests that would be acceptable to participants.

## The panel – a work in progress

The Health Systems Panel has been a new and innovative feature of public involvement at CLAHRC West. We have had useful input into the design of studies, feedback on data interpretation and ideas around policy. We recognise that as a new way of supporting public involvement in research that it is a work in progress and going forward we will be looking at developing a sharper focus in the face-to-face meetings and presenting members with a clearer sense of the outcomes that we are looking for.

We are planning to hold a review meeting for all members in the early summer of 2018, and conduct a more formal review of working in this way in 2019. We will ask members for their feedback on the experience of being a member to date, and share our thinking on how to facilitate and support panel meeting discussions so they are as effective as possible.

## More information

For more information about our Health Systems Panel contact Rosie Davies, Public Involvement Research Fellow at CLAHRC West email: [Rosemary3.davies@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Rosemary3.davies@uwe.ac.uk)

Jon Banks, Rosie Davies and Sabi Redwood

April 2018