



Research Activities Programme for Mental Health Nursing Students

Background

The current strategic plan for research, published November 2021, states: 'Research led by nurses and contributions they make as members of multidisciplinary research teams can drive change. It is the cornerstone of high-quality, evidence-based nursing.' (May, 2021). Ruth May, the Chief Nursing Officer for England, emphasises in this strategy the need for sustainable and supported careers. This includes raising awareness and opportunities for nurses to become involved in research, no matter where they work. To do this requires the provision of 'opportunities during pre-registration nursing programmes so students can experience the variety of research-related roles available to them throughout their careers.' The Saving and Improving Lives: The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery policy paper further highlights the need to embed clinical research at the heart of patient care across the NHS, 'ensuring all health and care staff feel empowered to support research'.

Many health care professionals would like to be involved in research alongside their clinical role but feel unable to do this due to lack of time, lack of support within the health care system and lack of opportunities for mentorship and collaboration (Paget, Caldwell, Murphy, Lilischkis & Morrow, 2017). Nurses in mental health trusts are often required to act as advocates for research; identifying, screening and recruiting eligible patients, and also taking on roles as Principal Investigators and Interventionists. However, they are often unaware of what these roles are, what they entail, how they can embed this into their clinical role, and even what the Research and Development department do in the trust and how research is conducted in an NHS setting. A major issue at hand is also, that whilst mental health nursing students learn about what research is during their pre-registration programme, this is taught at an academic level. There is currently a gap from this theoretical knowledge of what research is, to the conduct and facilitation of research in practice.

In mental health trusts, there is also only one Research and Development department whose staff do the majority of research activities across the trust and across clinical specialties. Therefore, they have to work on a range of studies in the vast amount of clinical specialties in mental health, which is dissimilar to the multiple specialty research teams often employed across acute trusts. In addition, the majority of mental health research staff tend not to have a clinical registration, instead developing their research career from their completion of a Social Science degree or similar. This makes the identification of eligible patients for studies extremely challenging, especially when required in a limited window of time. They have to be knowledgeable about the workings of every clinical service, how they can access their patients to offer research to them, the different presentations of the variety of mental health difficulties, and all without the experience of working in these clinical environments and the specialist knowledge. For research in mental health trusts to effectively and efficiently recruit to research studies, there is therefore a need to engage clinical practitioners, and as nurses are often very involved with patient care and knowledgeable of their service, they are perfectly placed to assist with clinical research.

However, once in post, nurses have significantly less time to dedicate to development opportunities; meaning requirements such as Good Clinical Practice training, understanding how clinical research is embedded into practice, and how they can become involved, is difficult to convey. Especially in today's climate, where many clinical departments are stretched in their nursing capacity. It can be challenging to identify nurses with the time to dedicate to such training. Therefore, it is imperative we utilise the time mental health nursing students have in clinical placements and the ethos embedded in those placements to develop their skills. We can use this crucial time point to ensure that NHS clinical research is taught within their curriculum and transferred into practical learning whilst on clinical placement. Whilst many acute trusts are able to offer research placements, as they have Research Nurses on staff who can act as assessor, this is not the case for all mental health trusts, with our trust at LYPFT being one of these examples of having no Research Nurses on staff able to offer this to students. We therefore propose a different model for mental health trusts, which will ensure all students (not just the few) are given the opportunity to learn about NHS research in practice and embed research activities into their clinical placements.

Our Solution

The Research Activities Programme started its development in January 2022. The Research Programme Manager for the trust (myself, Wendy Andrusjak) presented to final year mental health nursing students at the University of Leeds. It was at this presentation that we offered students the opportunity to get in touch with us if they wanted to know more about research. One enthusiastic student (Hannah Shephard) reached out and conveyed the alarming information that she was unaware of how research was set-up and implemented in the NHS. It was at this moment it became apparent there was a significant gap in theoretical knowledge to the implementation of research in practice. We worked together to identify the gaps in students knowledge and experience and how this could be improved.

I spoke to two other mental health trusts in the region, Sheffield Health and Social Care and Bradford District Care Trusts, having learnt that they had previously or were currently trying to engage students in research. SHSC had developed a programme of research activities that students could take part in to learn about research, however this wasn't implemented in local students curriculum and wasn't widely offered to students or staff. BDCT on the other hand had managed to impact on the University of Bradford's mental health nursing student programme, teaching students how research was conducted in the NHS; however, they did not offer practical learning opportunities to all students in an accessible way.

It was at this moment that I worked with Hannah to pilot and remodel SHSC's research activities programme, which was kindly provided by the trusts R&D manager Alix Smith. Hannah fed back on her experience of the different activities, and we were able to tailor the programme to the needs of LYPFT. We also worked to adapt the BDCT presentation, again kindly provided by the BDCT R&D department, to convey NHS research to mental health nursing students but also to raise awareness of the different research activities we could work to embed in their clinical placements. The Education Leads in the trust, clinical staff, the Executive Director of Nursing for LYPFT, professors at local universities, module leads and the R&D staff, have all been enthused about this new opportunity for our students and for research in the trust. It has therefore received much support and backing to implement these initiatives in students future curriculum and on clinical placements. Leads within Health Education England are also supportive of the programme and hope to implement this opportunity as standard for mental health nursing students.

The immediate impact we have observed with Hannah is her significant development in research knowledge within the NHS. She is now an advocate for many of our studies, and in her final placement has been able to actively identify and assist in the recruitment and assessment of eligible patients. The local CRN team have interviewed Hannah and she is to be a part of their newsletter. She was also shortlisted for Student Nurse of the Year in Clinical Research by the Nursing Times Awards. We were also accepted to present the programme at the Mental Health Nursing Research conference at Oxford on the 9th of September where we gained further national support from colleagues. It is quickly gaining traction within the clinical and research teams across the region and indeed nationally. Furthermore, the trust have not only observed the benefit of this programme for research in the trust, but have seen how much development it has provided clinically to Hannah as a student nurse in comparison to her peers. Therefore, they have funded us to continue this programme going forward, ensuring engagement of clinical staff in research is embraced and improved.

Plan for the future

The plan for the future is to pilot this programme in multiple trusts. A generic PowerPoint Presentation will be devised to present to student nurses. The Research Activities Opportunities document will be developed further and refined to ensure all activities are beneficial and feasible for R&D/Placements/Students. And students will be recruited to pilot the programme and an evaluation process will take place.

The NIHR (Cathy Henshall and team) are keen to support and their proposed project plan includes the below, which will be facilitated by 3 Senior Research Leaders who will commence their post in August 2023 and 2 days a week will be protected for them to support the 4 trusts taking on the pilot to implement the below, develop it, and evaluate its progress.

Aim: To evaluate the implementation of hybrid clinical research placements across a range of NHS settings to determine their value in exposing nursing students to research.

Study plan:

Stage 1: The key features of the hybrid model that have been successfully implemented in Leeds will be shared with the project team to enable replicability and fidelity of the intervention across multiple sites.

Stage 2: Identification of key sites confirmed, with a project lead for each site identified and appropriate resources allocated. We aim to evaluate the model in at least four sites (Leeds and Yorkshire, Oxford, Bradford, Lancashire and South Cumbria), with a focus on mental health and community-based settings.

Stage 3: Project coordinators at each site will liaise with clinical placement areas to agree four settings in which to pilot the hybrid model. Each placement area will identify a link nurse/midwife to liaise with the project lead at site to ensure clear communication pathways throughout the pilot. Regular project coordinator meetings will be set up for project leads to share ideas and work through challenges and implementation plans across the UK sites.

Stage 4: Student nurses allocated to the clinical research placement areas will be monitored and data will be collected on the following:

- Number of students (across each year of training) receiving clinical research placements across different learning environments
- Impact of placements on student research awareness and engagement (need to agree how this impact will be measured and what cross sectional and longitudinal data we want to capture that is meaningful)

- Feedback from clinical nurse supervisors/educators/R&D team members/university staff on implementing the model and any perceived benefits/challenges (via interviews+/-surveys)
- Likelihood of student to consider research in future nursing roles

Data will be captured via a variety of methods, including online, electronic surveys, interviews and/or focus groups with stakeholders. Data will be managed by the central NMO team.

Timelines:

Stage 1: January-March 2023

Stage 2: January-March 2023

Stage 3: April-June 2023

Stage 4: September 2023-Sept 2024

Stage 5: Write up, report and publish findings: Oct 2024-Dec 2024.

To facilitate this, an advisory group and implementation group is to be created and will meet regularly throughout the course of this programme. It will require collaboration, networking, engagement, initiative and creativity to effectively develop and formally implement. Preliminary contact with individuals; the advisory group will consist of Julia Turner (UoL MH Nursing Lecturer), Han Shephard (original student nurse), Ellie Gordon (mental Health Lead for HEE), Joanne Cooper (Head of Nursing for NHS England), Karl Ward (Research and Innovation Lead for Y&H). Whilst an implementation group will consist of the 3 SRLs, Wendy Andrusjak and maternity cover replacement (LYPFT), Alix Smith (SHSC), Jemima LittleJohns (Oxford), Cathy Henshall (Associate Director of Nursing NIHR), Lucy Ainsworth (Programme Officer for Nursing NIHR) and others interested.

Essential contacts and their involvement

To make this a success there have been a number of people involved. This ranges from internal LYPFT staff in all disciplines, to universities, other trusts, the NIHR, HEE and NHS England. There is an excel sheet in the shared drive that holds all these contacts and how they have been involved (can be sourced in the Embedding Research Project 2022 folder). However, below are the key contacts going forward with a description of how they will be key:

- Julia Turner and Gary Morris at the University of Leeds, both of whom provide access to student nurses and assist in spreading the word about this opportunity to their final year students (and hopefully in the future also to their second year students at the end of their second year).
- Adam Maher, the Service Improvement Lead for the trust, is instrumental in identifying interested students next placements and providing contact details of their assessors and ward managers so as to set up a working relationship prior to them going into that placement.
- Hannah Shephard, the original student nurse, is now a registered nurse at NICPM. She will be a Research Champion for the ward and is keen to support this programme and research going forward, happy to advise where needed
- Jules Poxton, Clinical Lead for Nursing working alongside Alison Quarry. She is keen to support research in nursing for the trust at a higher level and will be key in making this a formal opportunity at LYPFT. Keeping her informed will go some way to ensuring this is formally implemented for all student nurses.
- Cathy Henshall at the NIHR reviewed this programme and agreed on its effectiveness at a national level and took the Resource Document to an NIHR meeting to get NIHR support and implement formally in other trusts. Senior Research Leaders due to start in

August 2023 will be recruited to support this programme in 4 MH trusts including LYPFT and Cathy and her team will be the main contact for ensuring this progresses. Jamie Calderwood, Kate Atkinson, and Lucy Ainsworth at the NIHR will also be crucial in driving this forward with Cathy.

- Alix Smith at SHSC and Karl Ward at LTHT (working closely with BTHFT, UoL, LBU and BDCT) will be instrumental in ensuring this programme is implemented effectively in Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford. They are linked in already with Cathy and team but are allies in terms of growing this in Yorkshire.
- Ellie Gordon, Sarah Pemberton, Bev Clancy and Sarah Rowson at HEE will play a key role in pushing this forward with regards to support from HEE.
- Alison Richardson (Head of Nursing at NHS England) and Joanne Cooper will support and are willing to advise in its growth and implementation

See emails in the Embed folder in shared drive for previous conversations that may be of interest with the above individuals.

Achievements in 2022

In January 2022 was when this was implemented, by December 2022 we have been able to confirm the set up of a pilot project with the NIHR, below are some examples of significant steps made and resulted from this project:

- We worked with BDCT and SHSC to identify already developed resources in use to teach students about research
- We set up a network of key people required to make this possible for Han (Julia Turner Hans UoL supervisor, Adam Maher identifying where Han would next be placed, Alex Trapp NICPM placement Ward manager, and then Han and myself)
- Hannah was shortlisted to the top three for Student Nurse of the Year Award in Clinical Research for Nursing Times Awards
- We were invited to present the project at the Mental Health Nursing Research Conference in September 2022
- Hannah was interviewed by the CRN for their newsletter
- Hannah presented the programme to the Education Leads who then all expressed interest
- It gained significant support from leaders across the nation, including professors of universities, MH trusts, HEE, NIHR, NHS England, and across professions too including various AHP disciplines, junior doctors and registered staff at all levels. This has led to impressive networking within and outside the trust and enabled us to showcase research as an important clinical skill
- It has proven beneficial for services and the trust, enabling services who are strained to provide student placements the ability to share placements with us increasing relevant placements for students in these strained times
- It has developed awareness of research in other staff members through their interaction with Han
- Han was able to actively refer people to both the GLAD and NCMH study for us
- The NIHR want to pilot this as a programme in a number of MH trusts and are willing to supply some resource
- HEE and NHS England want to be included as advisors and run this in other institutions across the country

- AHP Clinical Leads, staff and students have also expressed interest in having access to these training opportunities. Trainee Doctors, Psychology leads in the trust and at LBU and HCSW's have also expressed interest in taking part.
- In January 2023 we will hopefully have, 4 student nurses (1 LBU apprentice student nurse, then 3 UoL students at NICPM, The Mount and The Green Care Home), 3 student dieticians, 2 assistant psychologists, and 2 internship students (a SaLT and a registered nurse)
- We have been asked to contribute to the national HEE Mental Health website and their specific Mental Health Research tab that will be included on their. This will include slides about the programme and blogs from myself and Han.