

Clinical research nurses were part of a team that started a Twitter campaign to communicate about the hidden world of research, and it has now gone global

Clinical research benefits go viral via Twitter

In this article...

- › The world of clinical research is poorly understood
- › A Twitter campaign communicated why people were involved
- › Researchers and patients all over the world have joined in

Authors Claire L Gibbs is senior clinical research nurse and Abby Greaves is research administrator at the James Paget University Hospitals Foundation Trust, Norfolk; Michael Keeling is National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) stroke research nurse at York Teaching Hospital Foundation Trust; Allan Gaw is associate director for educational quality standards; and Fiona O'Neill is head of workforce and organisational development both at NIHR Clinical Research Network.

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The world of clinical research is often poorly understood and can appear mysterious to patients, the public and healthcare staff. Much research takes place out of the public eye and only receives attention when the media announces the latest breakthrough or, in very rare cases, adverse outcomes.

For the health professionals and patients involved in clinical research, the day-to-day activities, purpose and value are much clearer. Discovery and advancement are the goals, but research is not about sensational developments – most advances in knowledge are incremental.

Research teams are staffed with dedicated, enthusiastic professionals who work with the voluntary help of their patients and the public to find new ways to address important clinical problems. If there is one criticism that could be levelled at research staff, it is that they have not been active in sharing the outcomes and value of their work. One reason for this is that they lacked a simple vehicle through which to share information about their work and

express their passion for research to the healthcare community and general public. This article demonstrates how a social media campaign helped to change this.

Research community

In December 2014 we invited the core research team at the James Paget University Hospital to pose for a photograph holding a placard explaining in simple terms why they did research. This was posted on the trust research department's Twitter account (@JPUHResearch) using the hashtag #WhyWeDoResearch.

The hashtag generated responses from outside the trust and what began as a simple way to introduce the research team to their clinical colleagues, patients and the local public gained momentum and attracted national and international attention through the force of social media.

Other research teams working in the NHS, in industry and in charities throughout England, the UK and finally internationally began to post their own reasons for being involved in clinical research. Patient participants, the most important members of the research team, have also joined in, tweeting their reasons for joining research projects.

Press releases supporting and publicising the hashtag were sent out from James Paget (2015) and also from Blackpool Teaching Hospitals (2015), which was keen to be involved in the campaign.

We also created and posted a YouTube video in January 2015, which received more than 400 views in its first week. At the time of writing it has received just under 1,100 (Bit.ly/JPHresearch). The hashtag has now been championed in nine other countries including Australia and the US. An idea

5 key points

1 The term clinical research is often poorly understood

2 A Twitter community has enabled staff and patients to share their interest in clinical research

3 Clinical researchers place patients' needs and wellbeing at the centre of their research

4 Social media platforms such as Twitter allow for rapid and global connectivity

5 Online communities offer opportunities to collaborate, share problems and develop solutions

