



MERSEY PRIMARY CARE R&D CONSORTIUM

WEBSITE: WWW.merseyprimarycare.org

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AGM SUCCESS

The Consortiums Annual General Meeting (AGM) which was held in the Foresight Centre at Liverpool University in May was very well attended. It included discussions concerning Consortium business matters and a variety of discussion forums. These topics included; ethical approval, general Consortium progress and a formal agreement on the Heart Failure Intervention Clinic.

USEFUL WEBSITE FOR NURSES

The following web site address is a comprehensive resource for many nursing sites which you may find useful. They include: journals, job sites, professional bodies, sources of funding for education and even financial advice.

www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/nhcon/nuuk.htm

PRACTICE ROADSHOWS

Core Team Roadshows, involving the combined administrative and research teams, have been set up. The Roadshow has visited each practice twice, once during the summer of 1999 and again during the spring 2000. These visits have been designed to consolidate links between the practices of the Consortium, to explain the roles and availability of the core team, to facilitate dialogue with practice members about practice based R&D activity, and to discuss individual training needs.

It has also helped keep the practices up to date with consortium business and gave practices the opportunity to offer their suggestions or ideas on how to improve communication and keep the research ideas alive within all the multidisciplinary teams within the practice. The roadshows will be held every 6 months to keep this process running smoothly.

The consortium would like to thank all the practices for their time and patience whilst organising these visits.

➔ GOOD NEWS!!

The Consortium have now received the carbonised pads from the DSS. Chris Shiels, Consortium researcher, is taking the lead in the distribution of the pads of certificates to each practice.

Update on Introduction to Research Workshops

A series of 3 half-day workshops was held for nurses in March 2000. Topics covered included: basic concepts of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, how to review a research paper, how to write a research proposal as well as discussions around research topics of interest to nurses working in the Consortium. Attendance averaged 12 per session with the majority of nurses attending all 3 sessions. The programme was well received and we plan to repeat a modified programme in the late summer for administration staff, GP's and nurses who were unable to attend the first time around.

Information on Publications since April 1999

Members of the Consortium have, over the last year, had a total of thirty-two publications in peer review journals. These publications span across each of the research activity areas. For further information please see the Annual Report on the Consortium website.

SUCCESSFUL R&D TRAINING

A major aim of the Consortium is to share and enhance the research and development skills of the entire primary care workforce in order to increase research capability within the entire Consortium. Thus, throughout the first year of the Consortium's existence, a great deal of effort has been put into both identifying training needs and supporting appropriate research training. All Consortium members have been asked to identify their research skills training needs and have been offered the opportunity of Consortium support to help meet these needs. This support has sometimes been of a financial nature, either covering the direct costs of external training or providing cover for primary care members needing time out to undergo training/development. However, the Consortium has also provided it's own in-house training, as required, on either a group or individual basis by members of the core research team. The Consortium's research capacity building efforts have been proactive as focus groups are being carried out with nursing teams, managers and GP's to look at factors that influence the primary health care team implementing research activities.



ACTIVITY AREA 1 - HEART FAILURE



Examining path ways to identification of the heart failure patient: a quantitative project

The aims of this study are:

To examine differences in stage of presentation and severity of illness at time of initial diagnosis based on gender and socio-economic status.

To examine time from initial presentation to confirmed diagnosis of left ventricular systolic dysfunction and explore whether there are differences based on gender and socio-economic status.

To explore management strategies, including drug therapy and referral patterns.

Related to the project above, is a qualitative study, using semi structured interviews with individuals, recently diagnosed with Heart Failure. These interviews will try to uncover individuals perceptions of their condition, how it has disrupted their life, and future predictions of the illness course.

Care of dying patients with heart failure: perceptions and practice

This study will explore doctors' perceptions of current and ideal care for terminal heart failure, in order to find better ways of managing this condition. Initial work will centre on carrying out focus groups with doctors, (GP's, cardiologists, geriatricians, general physicians and consultants in palliative care). The participants will identify what they perceive as important issues in the care of terminal heart failure. The next stage phase of the project will be a national postal questionnaire, based in themes identified from the focus groups. This will investigate current UK practice using clinical scenarios, and capture attitudes to the development of more holistic care, the involvement of other disciplines and inter professional communication. This project has also received £5000 of external support from the Heart Failure and Assessment Unit at South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust.

ESCAPE

The aim of the project is to study a cohort of patients presenting with chest pain at two A&E departments in Liverpool (Royal and Fazakerley). This cohort will be divided into 2 groups: one will receive normal care, whilst the other will go through a Rapid Assessment Chest Pain Service. The Consortium is supporting this pilot study through a £10,000 grant and a Consortiums researchers time. This pilot study will form the basis of an application to the MRC/BHF, with total costs approaching £1 million.

ACTIVITY AREA 2 - ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Postnatal depression

Health Visitor caseload 1998 review

Retrospective study of postnatal depression screening using Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) and other methods, and clinical services response to those with EPDS>12. The results suggest there is no consistency of screening or health service response to diagnosis.

Longitudinal Cohort Study

Feb/Mar 2000 births. EPDS administered at 6-8,12-16, and 26-30 weeks postnatal visits by health visitors. Linked to demographic data, we wish to map changes. Mothers of babies spending > 24hrs in ICU post delivery or with major abnormalities are excluded. This study will seek information on prevalence, risk factors and the most appropriate times for using EPDS.

These studies will provide pilot data, develop enthusiasm for research activities across consortium staff, and test out methodologies and recruitment strategies. The projects are also capacity building within the Consortium, providing research experience and training. We are obtaining some valuable baseline data and experience in consortium linked staff using the EPDS. This will all be crucial to enhancing our potential success in obtaining further research funding.



Frequent Attenders

The Consortium is currently looking at the incidence of frequent attenders in five of its constituent practices. Through quantitative analysis of patient records, each practice is compiling lists of frequent attenders, stratified by sex and age. Once this has been completed, GP's will be asked to rate these individuals notes on the basis of clinical outcome. Both GP's and reception staff have been asked for their 'Top Ten Frequent Attenders' to assess differences between the two. Local analysis of frequent attenders will be performed which will then inform qualitative work with patients.

ACTIVITY AREA 3 - SICKNESS CERTIFICATION



The number of people claiming long-term sickness benefits has increased significantly in the UK in particular, and Western Europe in general, over the last 25 years. In the UK, the number of claimants of Incapacity Benefit (and its predecessor, Invalidity Benefit) increased by over 200% between 1975 and 1995. In this same period, state spending on these benefits increased four fold. In May 1998, the DSS estimated that 7% of the working population were claiming Incapacity Benefit, compared to an unemployment rate of 5%. More people were "on the sick" than "on the dole".

While the DSS has published information on the composition of the claimant group, and investigation of the causes of the increase in claimants has been undertaken, little is known about the early stages of the claim. i.e. the initial patient requests for sicknotes from the GP.

The Consortium aims to begin to rectify this situation by constructing a database of sickness certification details across its nine constituent general practices.

The consortium is currently working with the DSS in the production and piloting of carbonised MED3, MED4 and MED5 certificates. These certificates will ensure that after GP completion a copy of basic certification details is retained on a separate sheet. It is planned to recruit a practice staff member to collect the sheets at the end of each week, and to enter the relevant details into a database/spreadsheet. Full costs for this work will be reimbursed to all practices.

It is hoped that all 40 GPs in the consortium practices will agree to use these carbonised certificates for an initial period of six months, this will start in September.

ACTIVITY AREA 4 - TELEMEDICINE



Members of the Brownlow Group Practice (which provides health services to a large proportion of the student population of Liverpool University) aim to evaluate the feasibility of developing an interactive web site which will offer patient information and can be used for repeat prescriptions, travel vaccinations and to provide other patient services. Consultation on the software development is being provided by Mr. Stephan Mayer of Living Media and Mr Howard Seymour of the North West Regional Health Authority. The project has a maximum of £10,000 available.

ACTIVITY AREA 5 - R&D IN PCG'S

Resource implications of clinical governance in primary care

This project aims to examine the resource implications (financial and manpower) for PCGs in implementing Clinical Governance, using the Liverpool 'Clinical Standards' document as a base. The project is to be based cross the 5 PCGs in Liverpool, looking at two practices within each group. To date, one practice from each group has agreed to take part in some initial work, and of these, three are consortium practices. The work will be based around particular themes to be chosen by the practices. Pilot work is underway in The Elms Practice.

Roy Woodward and John Hussey have secured £10,000 from Region for this project and the consortium will fund the costs relating to the involvement of consortium practices.



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