

May 2020

Patient Safety and COVID-19 – the importance of NIHR PSTRCs

Since 2012, the NIHR has supported research into patient safety through funding Patient Safety Translational Research Centres (PSTRCs). There are now three centres: Greater Manchester PSTRC, Imperial PSTRC and Yorkshire and Humber PSTRC. These centres operate as partnerships between a host NHS organisation and affiliated universities.

COVID-19 has brought to the fore the significance of patient safety like never before. Behavioural science has underpinned many of the most challenging safety concerns that have emerged during this time. This includes the effort to encourage the general public to follow government guidelines on physical distancing, the importance of staff wellbeing along with infection control in hospital. Understanding why people do what they do and promoting changes in behaviour are prominent features across the PSTRCs' work.

The PSTRCs are dedicated to improving patient safety across specific areas of the NHS and social care. The centres are designed to be agile and responsive to emerging research priorities, focusing on applying novel approaches to unsolved questions. The PSTRCs proactively involve patients, gathering their experiences before creating interventions to improve specific patient safety concerns. New safety initiatives developed by PSTRCs are then tested or piloted in the appropriate healthcare setting such as a hospital, GP practice, care home or pharmacy.

The centres' role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic focuses on adapting existing work and building upon it to address some of the challenges facing the NHS. Examples are projects related to promoting safer behaviours in hospitals, care homes, and other healthcare settings. In addition, new research has been launched to understand and support the response to COVID-19.

An example from the Greater Manchester PSTRC is the launch of a study that looks at the mental health of survivors of COVID-19 as well as the general population within Greater Manchester including those with lived experience of homelessness. Another example is the roll out nationally of a digital triage system for use by GPs which had been previously designed by researchers within the Safety Informatics team based at the Greater Manchester centre.

Yorkshire and Humber PSTRC is exploring how healthcare organisations, such as hospitals and community pharmacies, have adapted operations to respond safely to the COVID-19 threat. It is also exploring the emotional support needs of healthcare staff and researching the impact of COVID-19 on people's decisions to seek emergency healthcare.

Imperial PSTRC is assisting the WHO with guidance on medication safety during the pandemic and has launched a study looking at the impact of COVID-19 on digital technology in primary care. In addition, the centre is supporting the REal-time Assessment of Community Transmission (REACT) study, a national, Imperial-led programme investigating COVID-19 prevalence and the use of home testing.

The centres also recognise that this is a critical time for increasing the amount of research undertaken to support the NHS. Examples of this are developing online learning opportunities for those working in healthcare, online support communities and resources, and creating virtual research communities to allow work to continue even when face to face research isn't possible.

The centres each focus work across specific themes* which span behavioural science, mental health, patients and carers, medication safety, transitions of care between healthcare settings, and digital interventions including designing dashboards and Artificial Intelligence. These themes are well placed to address the impact on the wellbeing of the workforce, the resilience of specific areas of healthcare, the role patients and carers are playing in patient safety at this time, and access to healthcare by specific groups of patients such as those with lived experience of homelessness.

Read more about the work of Yorkshire and Humber PSTRC in this blog from the Centre Director, Professor Rebecca Lawton and Centre Manager Dr Beth Fylan:

<https://yhpstrc.org/the-role-of-translational-patient-safety-research-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>

Find out how the Imperial PSTRC involves people in its research, and how the Centre is adapting its involvement and engagement activities during COVID-19 in this blog:

<https://wwwf.imperial.ac.uk/blog/ighi/2020/05/20/its-people-who-shape-our-research-hereshow/>

To learn more about the work of the Greater Manchester PSTRC during the COVID-19 pandemic read Centre Director Stephen Campbell's thoughts here in his latest blog:

<https://gmpstrc.wordpress.com/2020/06/03/the-role-of-translational-patient-safety-research-during->

and-after-the-covid-19-crisis/

For more information on the PSTRCs please visit:

Great Manchester PSTRC <http://www.patientsafety.manchester.ac.uk/>

@PSTRC_GM

Yorkshire & Humber PSTRC <https://yhpstrc.org/>

@YH_PSTRC

Imperial - <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/patient-safety-translational-research-centre/>

@Imperial_PSTRC

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Research themes:

GM PSTRC – Safety Informatics, Medication Safety, Marginalised groups (including two sub themes, Mental Health and Patients and Carers), Safer Care systems and Transitions of Care (including the Behavioural Science sub theme), and Safety in Marginalised Groups.

Yorkshire & Humber PSTRC - Patient Involvement in Patient Safety, Workforce Engagement and Wellbeing, Safe Use of Medicines, and Digital Innovations

Imperial PSTRC – Safer Systems across the Continuum of Care, Partnering with Patients for Safer Care, Avoiding Deterioration in Complex Needs Patients, Enhancing the Safety of Medication and Technology, Improving Diagnostic Accuracy and Decision Making and Improving Diagnostic Accuracy and Decision Making.