

New research on quality, safety and clinical governance in NHS and independent hospitals: lessons from the interface

A new research study is exploring how arrangements for clinical governance work across the interface between NHS and independent hospitals. This FAQ tells you more about the research and how your hospital can get involved. If you would like to know more, please email our research coordinator, Ellie Gee, at eleanor.gee@manchester.ac.uk.

What is the research about?

There have been concerns about the way clinical governance arrangements for assuring and improving quality and safety work across the interface between NHS and independent hospitals, but there has been very little empirical research in this area. This research will examine the quality and safety of patient care in NHS and independent hospitals and the way that systems for overseeing clinical care and sharing information work in practice.

Who is doing the research?

The research is a collaboration between researchers at the Universities of Manchester, York and Birmingham and is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR – grant no NIHR135108).

The research is overseen by a project advisory group chaired by Andrew Vallance-Owen, formerly Chief Medical Officer for BUPA and also formerly the chair of the board of the Private Healthcare Information Network (PHIN) with a range of stakeholders represented including NHS England, the Care Quality Commission and the Independent Healthcare Providers Network (IHPN).

Why do we need some hospitals to get involved?

The main aim of our research is to understand how quality and patient safety are monitored and managed across the interface between NHS and independent hospitals. To meet this aim, we will be carrying out in-depth case studies of clinical governance in four groups or "clusters" of NHS and independent hospitals.

Each "cluster" will consist of some NHS and independent hospitals in the same area/place with consultants who work at both the NHS and independent hospitals. We will try to understand how clinical governance processes develop and how they are working at the interface of these NHS and independent hospitals. We think it would be useful to do the research in some different types of hospital configuration:

A simple cluster – involving just one NHS hospital and one or two nearby independent hospitals, and likely to be located in a large town or a mixed urban/rural setting.

A complex cluster – involving one or two NHS hospitals and two or more nearby independent hospitals, and likely to be located in a large city/urban setting where there may be many NHS and independent hospitals.

We are now inviting independent hospitals and NHS hospitals who are interested in taking part in the research to get in touch with the research team for an initial discussion about what would be involved, and how the research could help them. We will need agreement to take part from both the independent and NHS hospitals in a given location.

What will be happening if we take part in the research?

The first step before you agree to take part will be for us to meet with some key individuals – such as the medical director, clinical governance lead or other staff – to explain what is involved and how we think participating in the research could help. Our fieldwork will mainly involve us reading and analysing

documents or background material about the hospital; undertaking interviews with a staff involved in clinical governance (some more details of this are given below); and potentially attending some meetings about clinical governance issues to observe them. We know everyone working in NHS and independent hospitals is very busy and we will be very pragmatic about managing our research to fit in around other demands on their time.

We would like to interview people who are involved in leading clinical governance in both the NHS and independent hospitals. This might include clinical governance leads, medical directors, registered managers, hospital directors, matrons, chairs of Medical Advisory Committees, medical performance leads, clinical directors/clinical leaders, responsible officers and appraisers, other health professionals with an interest in clinical governance, those leading on patient experience/complaints/PALS, and local Healthwatch representatives.

We anticipate interviewing approximately six to eight staff in each case study site and informed written consent will be obtained from all interview participants. We will aim to undertake interviews face to face where possible as we envisage visiting case study sites on a number of occasions over several months.

What about research ethics and consent?

The project has been reviewed by NHS REC (23/EE/0104) and has been given Health Research Authority ethical approval.

For our interviews, anyone we ask to take part will be given an information sheet to keep and if they decide to take part, they will be asked to sign a consent form. Interviews will take place either face-to-face or over Zoom/Microsoft Teams at a time convenient to the interviewee, and are likely to last about an hour. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

If we ask to observe any meetings, consent will be sought from the meeting organiser in advance of the meeting. A participant information sheet will be shared with attendees and they will be asked by the meeting organiser if they are happy for the meeting to be observed. If attendees are uncomfortable for any reason with researchers observing the meeting, the meeting will not be observed. Where meetings are observed, we will ask the chair at the beginning of the meeting to confirm ongoing consent with attendees.

How can the research help me and my hospital, and other hospitals?

We hope that this research will be useful to everyone working on clinical governance, quality and safety in NHS and independent hospitals. It will result in an NIHR research report and some journal papers and the project team will seek to present findings at various meetings and forums. No people or organisations who participated in the research will be identified in the report or any publications

For the hospitals who take part, we will offer some early feedback on the findings from the research and the opportunity to join some confidential group discussions with other participating hospitals to share learning and experiences. We are also keen to offer participating hospitals some example consultant activity reports (covering both NHS and independent hospital activity and drawing on routine data) for use in appraisals and other discussions. This will require the consent of the consultants concerned.

How do I find out more?

If you would be interested in taking part in this research, or if you have any questions, please contact our project co-ordinator [Ellie Gee](mailto:Eleanor.gee@manchester.ac.uk) (Eleanor.gee@manchester.ac.uk) to and we can arrange a meeting on Teams/Zoom to discuss it and provide some more information.

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