

Qualitative research drives participant involvement in the exploration of the new role of Physician Associates in secondary care in Norfolk

Background

Physician Associates (PAs) are new intermediary medical professionals employed to meet growing demands on healthcare. Recent research on Physician Associates (PAs) in secondary care has highlighted benefits and concerns about their employment in the NHS. Benefits were- better continuity of care, improve patient flow, better patient experience, release doctors time. Concerns were lack of regulation and authority, lack of understanding by the public, productivity not quantifiable (Drennan 2019). We chose an iterative mixed-methods, case-study approach to explore the nature of PAs contribution to collaborative care, and their integration into the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) in three Norfolk hospital Trusts, where PAs have only been employed since 2018.

Research strategy

- Informant discussions with a PA and clinicians and literature review
- Single point of contact at each trust
- Questionnaires, with open-ended questions,
- Focus group schedules for PAs
- Interview schedules for staff and patients
- Member validation of the transcripts by participants.
- Iterative thematic analyses by the researchers
- Early themes will be discussed and refined with participants and other stakeholders

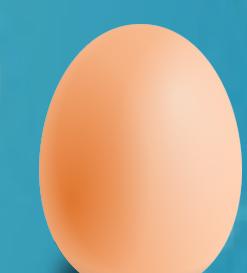
Challenges

- Accessing suitable stakeholders
- Contact issues
- Gaining balanced opinions
- Time issues
- Potential shift from initial research focus
- Managing different viewpoints
- Presentation of findings



Why use this approach?

Qualitative research allowed us to better understand the research topic where there is little research and enabled us to drive participant involvement.



Benefits

- Provides on-the-ground knowledge
- Refine and focus the research topic
- Choice of suitable research methods
- Devise pertinent questions
- Better use of research funds
- Provides findings pertinent to the topic
- Member validation helps with trustworthiness of data
- Research power shift
- Gives ownership to participants

On reflection

- Rich information about the research topic
- Generation of novel ideas
- NHS staff are a “hard to reach group”
- Few participants able or willing to devote time to research
- Reality check - best laid plans.....



Reference

Drennan, VM., Halter, M., Wheeler, C., Nice, L., Bearly, S., Ennis, J., Gabe, J., Gage, H., Levenson, R., de Lusignan, S., Begg, P., Parle, J. (2019) What is the contribution of physician associates in hospital care in England? A mixed methods, multiple case study. BMJ Open. Doi 10.1136/bmjopen-2018-027012