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**Title: Patients admitted to more research-active hospitals have more confidence in staff and are better informed about their condition and medication; results from a retrospective cross-sectional study.**

Running title: **Research activity and information provision to patients.**

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**Conflicts of interest:** Both LJ and SJF are in receipt of NIHR funding through their regional Clinical Research Network for delivery of NIHR national portfolio studies. DD is the clinical lead for NIHR-funded research within his employing NHS Trust, and has in the past received NIHR grant funding.

29 **Key Words:** National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), NHS Survey, Care Quality Commission  
30 (CQC), Summary Hospital-level Mortality Indicator (SHMI), National Health Service (NHS)

31

## 32 **Summary**

### 33 *Rationale, aims and objectives*

34 Clinical research activity in hospitals is associated with reduced mortality and improved overall care  
35 quality. In England, the latter is a compound score of several elements and both staff and inpatient  
36 feedback form part of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) ratings. The objective of this study was  
37 to determine if NHS Trusts' National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) study activity data  
38 correlates with specific outcomes from national NHS staff and patient surveys.

### 39 *Method*

40 Retrospective cohort design involving data for 129 English NHS hospital Trusts, including scores  
41 from recent national NHS staff and inpatient surveys and NIHR data. Statistical approach involved  
42 Spearman correlation analyses, with cut-off p-value  $\leq 0.01$  for qualification for subsequent  
43 principal component analysis (correlation coefficient cut-off value 0.20).

### 44 *Results*

45 Outcomes of one staff survey question (staff recommendation of the organisation as a place to  
46 work or receive treatment) and multiple outcomes of inpatient survey questions were positively  
47 associated with increased NIHR-adopted clinical research activity. Better quality of information  
48 provision to patients was the dominant theme, though a higher degree of observed staff

49 teamwork, more confidence in the treating doctors, and a better overall inpatient experience also  
50 correlated significantly. The number of different studies contributed more to positive associations  
51 with survey outcomes compared to the number of recruited participants into research.

## 52 *Conclusions*

53 Survey elements of the CQC appraisal of English NHS Hospital Trusts are significantly associated  
54 with increased clinical research activity levels; it appears to drive better information provision to  
55 inpatients – particularly around medicine management - and contribute to a better inpatient  
56 experience overall, whilst staff are more likely to recommend their own organisation. Despite  
57 clinical research activity forming a very small fraction of overall NHS activity, it has an indirect  
58 positive effect on staff and Trust performance that is measurable at patient level.

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60

## 61 **Introduction**

62 Clinical research can result in gains beyond the direct intended benefits, such as improved efficacy,  
63 performance, or safety of a new medicinal product or medical device. Examples of a wider positive  
64 impact of clinical research activity at specialty-level are better health outcomes for those  
65 participating in clinical trials when compared to patients receiving standard care in obstetrics &  
66 gynaecology, and improved survival rates for colorectal cancer patients who attend NHS Trusts that  
67 are more research active.<sup>1,2</sup> At an organisation level, studies have shown an association between  
68 increased clinical research activity levels - be it National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) activity  
69 or academic output - and reduced mortality rates.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Furthermore, engagement in clinical research  
70 is associated with improved wider healthcare performance at organisation level.<sup>5,6,7</sup> These  
71 developments have spurred the Care Quality Commission (CQC), a national body that inspects NHS  
72 Trusts in England, and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), the over-arching  
73 organisation for management of clinical research in the UK, to work towards incorporating clinical  
74 research activity as an outcome measure in CQC inspections for NHS Trusts.<sup>8</sup> Since a CQC rating, and  
75 hence a NHS Trust's performance in relation to quality, is based on various elements it would be  
76 desirable to identify discrete reasons or elements for seeing higher healthcare standards in more  
77 research-active NHS Trusts. To date, unpicking how clinical research may have a positive effect on  
78 the performance of a healthcare organisation, or defined clinical specialty, has proven to be difficult  
79 to achieve, and it has been suggested that national public database interrogation may shed a light  
80 on the 'mechanism of action'.<sup>7</sup>

81 In this study we analyse how NIHR-adopted clinical research activity in NHS Trusts may be linked with  
82 improved healthcare quality by correlating it with outcomes from two national NHS surveys: one for  
83 inpatients and one for NHS staff. Both surveys form part of CQC rating exercises of NHS Trusts.

84 Potential relationships between clinical research activity and patient and staff perception on  
85 healthcare quality in individual NHS Hospital Trusts in England will be explored.

86

## 87 **Methods**

### 88 *Ethics statement and data sources*

89 This concerns a service evaluation and therefore no approval was sought from the national  
90 research ethics service or health research authority. The data used in this retrospective cross-  
91 sectional study of English NHS hospital Trusts is publically available via NHS and NIHR electronic  
92 depositories. The methodology for obtaining NIHR research activity, CQC data and SHMI data has  
93 been published previously.<sup>5</sup> In summary, NIHR research activity for the accrual years 2012-17 was  
94 obtained from NIHR Open Data Platform website.<sup>9</sup> Clinical staffing numbers for each NHS hospital  
95 Trust in England were obtained from NHS Digital, whereas CQC ratings for said Trusts as of October  
96 2017 were obtained from the CQC website.<sup>10, 11</sup> The average SHMI value for each NHS Trust for the  
97 calendar years 2014, 2015 and 2016 was calculated.<sup>12,13</sup>

98 New data added to the existing dataset from the Jonker & Fisher publication includes data from the  
99 2016 and 2017 (average score) NHS staff survey and 2017 in-patient survey respectively. Both are  
100 available on the NHS survey website.<sup>14</sup> For the NHS staff survey, all questions – called Key Findings  
101 by NHS surveys – were included in the analyses. For the in-patient survey, only questions applicable  
102 to all in-patients, regardless of route of entry to hospital or treating specialty – thereby excluding  
103 admission route questions (via accident & emergency or elective admissions), surgical procedures,

104 and questions on various waiting times - were included. The scoring methodology for each survey is  
105 outlined in documents available via NHS surveys web site.

#### 106 *Data processing and analyses*

107 Data was collected in Excel and transferred to SPSS v20 for analysis. As outlined previously,<sup>5</sup> a  
108 quotient was produced for studies and participants, by dividing the number of studies and accrued  
109 participants by the number of clinic staff per NHS Trust. This resulted in six 'research activity  
110 quotients': total number of studies, total number of participants, total number of interventional  
111 studies, total number of interventional participants, total number of observational studies and  
112 total number of observational participants quotients. Spearman correlation analyses were  
113 conducted first – the survey outcome measures are based on Likert-scale response options which  
114 are then given a weighted score. Only when one of the survey elements was significantly correlated  
115 to one of the two 'research activity quotients', ie total number of research studies or total number  
116 of participants divided by clinical staff number, was this element then included in the subsequent  
117 analysis. A p-value of < 0.01 in the Spearman correlation analyses was considered statistically  
118 significant. A stringent p-value was opted for to counteract any multiplicity of testing error that  
119 may occur when first applying Spearman correlation coefficient and then a subsequent inferential  
120 test to the same data. Subsequent principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted to explore  
121 the relationship between the earlier analysed factors of Trust-specific NIHR research activity,  
122 mortality (SHMI), CQC rating, and significant results from the two NHS surveys (in-patients and  
123 staff). Since the focus was on identifying factors with a shared variance, a correlation coefficient  
124 cut-off value of 0.2 was applied for the rotated component matrix table.<sup>15</sup>

#### 125 **Results.**

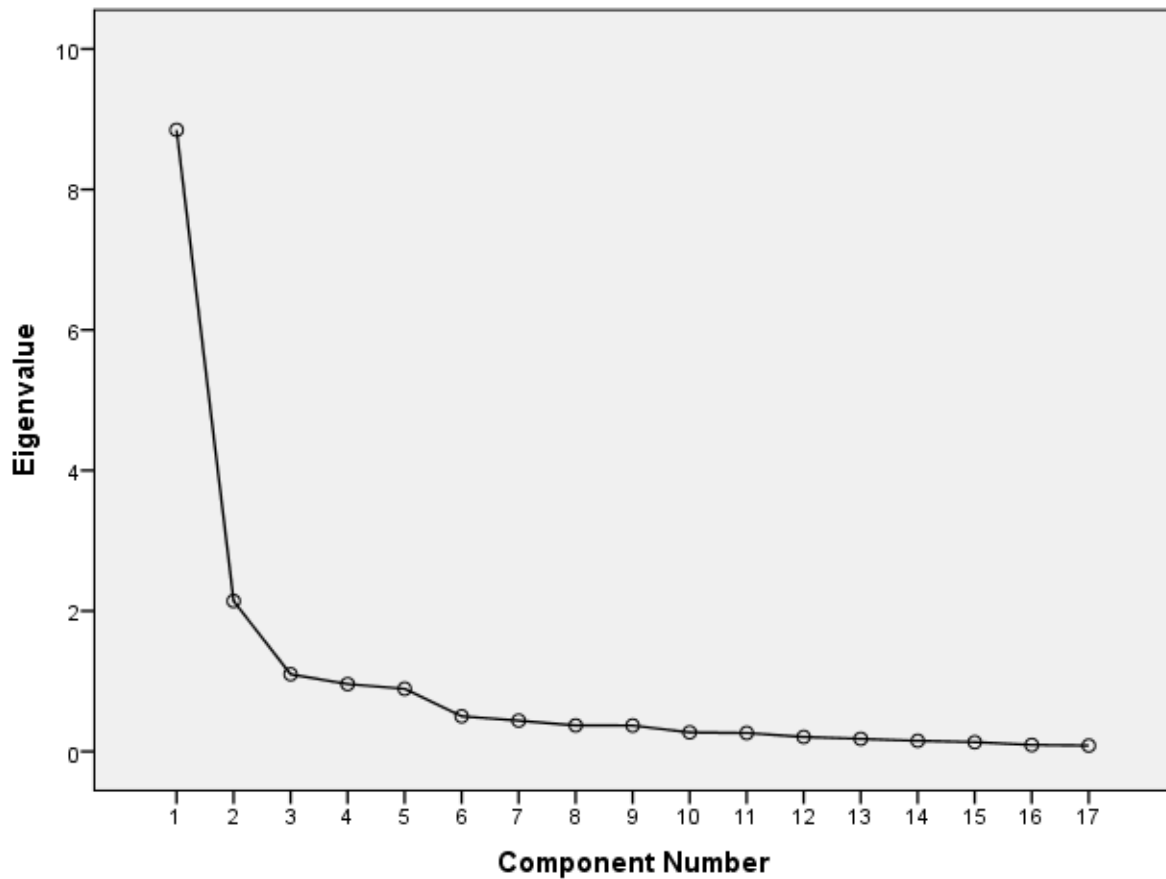
126 National survey, SHMI and CQC data was available for 129 English NHS Hospital Trusts that have  
127 existed for the collated five years of NIHR research activity. As before, specialty NHS Trusts that cover  
128 only one speciality were not included since they do not offer the range of services provided in an  
129 average acute hospital. The significantly associated survey questions identified via Spearman  
130 analyses are summarised in Table 1, whereas Table 2 gives a full description of how the survey  
131 questions were worded in the original NHS survey literature. Although a number of inpatient survey  
132 questions are statistically correlated with both research studies and participants quotients, only one  
133 staff survey question was linked with NIHR research activity – staff recommendation of their own  
134 Trust to others. Some of the staff survey outcomes that were not linked to research activity at all  
135 were ‘Staff satisfaction with the quality of work and care they are able to deliver’ (question KF2;  
136 Spearman’s rho -0.034, p-value 0.71 for research studies quotient) and ‘Staff motivation at work’  
137 (question KF4; Spearman’s rho -0.11, p-value 0.22). Further Spearman analyses did not identify any  
138 survey questions that were correlated specifically with interventional or observational studies, and  
139 therefore subsequent analyses used the overall research studies and research participants’  
140 quotients. All the outcome elements from the two national NHS staff and in-patient surveys,  
141 including questions where correlation was not statistically significant, are presented in Supplement  
142 1 (Table S1-1 and Table S1-2 respectively). The observed correlation between NIHR research activity  
143 and staff / in-patient question outcomes was observed even when the data was stratified for the size  
144 of a NHS hospital Trust (acute teaching, large, medium, and small hospital Trusts) as outlined in  
145 Supplement 2, Table S2-1 through S2-4. The significant association between survey outcomes and  
146 research activity is visualised by showing data for staff survey question KF1, inpatient question Q35,  
147 and inpatient question Q68 versus the research studies quotient.

148



149 Any relationship between the NHS staff and inpatient surveys and research activity were  
150 subsequently investigated with PCA testing. The significantly associated survey outcome measures  
151 from the Spearman analyses, one question in the case of the staff survey and twelve questions from  
152 the inpatient survey, were analysed as part of the PCA test. The components identified through PCA  
153 were highly significantly correlated, see Table 3. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling  
154 adequacy was 0.92, whereas the p-value for Bartlett's test of sphericity was <0.001. Three positively  
155 correlated components emerged from PCA, namely 1) inpatient survey outcomes, staff survey  
156 outcome, and the number of research studies conducted, 2) inpatient survey outcomes, staff survey  
157 outcome, CQC rating and SHMI mortality (negative association for the latter), and 3) research activity  
158 in terms of studies and patients recruited, mortality (negative association), and inpatient survey  
159 outcomes. Component 1 accounted for 52.0% of variance within the model, whereas component 2  
160 contributed 12.6% and component 3 accounted for 6.5%. Figure 1 shows the scree plot for this  
161 analysis with Eigen values. Therefore, of the three components, component 1 and 3 included  
162 research activity components.

163 **Figure 1, Scree plot for principal component analysis of research activity and staff and inpatient surveys**



164

165

166 *The relationship between CQC rating, SHMI mortality, and survey questions significantly associated ( $p$ -value*  
 167 *< 0.01) with research studies or participants quotient were assessed with PCA.*

168

169 **Discussion**

170 Following the recent publications that have shown that clinical research activity is related to a single  
 171 outcome measure (mortality rates) and a compound score representative of care quality (CQC  
 172 rating), the current study aimed to further explore the elements that make up the latter. Staff and  
 173 inpatient surveys give a unique perspective from people who work in NHS hospitals every day, and  
 174 those who receive care as an inpatient. To assess various outcome measures in a single analysis,  
 175 including research activity, survey results, mortality and CQC rating, the multi-dimensional analysis

176 tool PCA was performed rather than e.g. linear regression analysis, since this only allows one  
177 dependent and it is not known how the significantly correlated independent variables are related.

178 Before appraising and discussing the findings of this study, it is important to emphasise that clinical  
179 research activity forms only a fraction of the overall patient activity in the NHS. In England, the total  
180 number of recruited patients in interventional studies alone is no more than approximately 1 in 400  
181 out-patient contacts; in an inpatient setting this figure will likely be lower still.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, any  
182 association between clinical research activity and survey outcomes is likely an in-direct effect (such  
183 as a certain organisational culture as a 'side-effect' of conducting clinical research, or vice versa if  
184 best practice is considered to be more conducive to conducting clinical research). A shortcoming of  
185 this study and any non-controlled retrospective cohort study, due to the high risk of confounding  
186 and difficulties untangling cause and effect, is that one cannot conclude with certainty that clinical  
187 research drives favourable staff and inpatient survey outcomes. The same applies for the established  
188 links between mortality rates and CQC ratings, demonstrated once more in this present study.<sup>5,16</sup>  
189 This issue was highlighted in a systematic review by Boaz and colleagues.<sup>7</sup> As a case-in-point,  
190 Downing and colleagues found that more research-active colorectal cancer treatment centres have  
191 a greater arsenal of diagnostic and therapeutic tools. However, what is not certain is whether  
192 research participation contributes to this kind of infrastructure enrichment, or if a pre-existing wider  
193 availability of this type of equipment contributes to increased research activity and therefore –for  
194 example - improved survival rates.<sup>2</sup>

195 The first observation from the results obtained is that only one element of the staff survey (out of  
196 32 questions, or key findings) is significantly associated with clinical research activity, whereas for 12  
197 out of 24 questions included in the correlation analysis for the inpatient survey significantly  
198 associated with NIHR-adopted research activity. Nonetheless, of all the questions in the staff survey,

199 KF1 is one of the questions that asks the staff to comment on the performance of the Trust as a  
200 whole, as opposed to asking them about how their role impacts on performance or whether they as  
201 an individual have experienced bullying or violence, or are being asked to work additional hours.  
202 What is perhaps surprising or disappointing, is that staff survey questions related to personal  
203 development, including levels of non-mandatory training, and learning, and staff work satisfaction  
204 and motivation were not found to be associated with research activity levels. It would be logical for  
205 research-active staff to be involved in more training and learning, for example the clinical trial-  
206 related Good Clinical Practice training. However, survey responses from (clinical) staff involved in  
207 research will have been a small proportion of all the survey responses.

208 When the questions from the inpatient survey that are significantly correlated with increased  
209 research activity are reviewed, a number of themes emerge that can logically be linked to processes  
210 related to conducting and engagement in clinical research: high levels of staff teamwork, good  
211 quality information provision to patients (including in relation to medicines management), clinical  
212 staff involving patients in their care in a respectful manner, and - possibly of a result of these three  
213 themes? - patients having confidence in the doctors treating them. Based on the data from the  
214 Spearman correlation analyses and PCA, we can conclude that the associations between research  
215 activity and survey outcomes can be classed as moderate and statistically highly significant. It should  
216 be noted from the PCA data that the number of studies conducted in a NHS Trust is linked to more  
217 inpatient survey outcomes than the number of participants recruited. This is also supported by the  
218 percentage variance contributed by each of the three identified components; component 1, in which  
219 the research studies quotient but not the research participants quotient is associated significantly  
220 with positive patient and staff survey outcomes, contributes over half of the variance. Although  
221 speculative, this may reflect that more studies will likely mean more specialties in a hospital being

222 involved in clinical research; this in turn would mean more staff being exposed to research and  
223 adopting best clinical practice, and therefore would have a larger wider impact than recruiting more  
224 patients in fewer studies involving fewer clinical specialties. On a single-specialty level, this has been  
225 shown for colorectal patients (all patients even when not participating in a trial) and obstetric &  
226 gynaecology patients (patients who participate in research trials).<sup>1,2</sup>

227 Based on the observations from this study, one could ask the question: why would clinical staff in  
228 research-active hospital be more competent in the provision of information to patients in an easy-  
229 to-understand manner, whilst treating patients in a dignified manner? As with the impact of running  
230 more research studies, an explanation to this question is hard to substantiate in the absence of  
231 evidence from prospective controlled studies. However, it is conceivable that clinical staff who are  
232 used to conducting clinical research, which involves adherence to a protocol, careful and thorough  
233 provision of study information to patients and the diligent collection of data, will adopt at least some  
234 of these 'good habits' into routine clinical practice. Numerous studies have shown that better quality  
235 information provision has a positive impact on patients' well-being and therefore contribute to  
236 better quality care.<sup>17,18,19</sup> In parallel, a 'trial' effect of better adherence to guidelines and prescription  
237 to latest research evidence was observed in those members of staff who are involved in conducting  
238 research.<sup>20</sup> As a result of a review of the literature, Boaz, Hanney and colleagues reported that at the  
239 clinician level, engagement in research can positively influence behaviour and attitude and it  
240 contributes to staff education. At an organisational level resources and infrastructure used in  
241 research trials may be used beyond those studies in standard clinical practice, plus new (beneficial)  
242 treatments and practice may be rolled out more readily.<sup>6,7</sup>

243 Data from this present study and previous studies shows that engagement in clinical research is  
244 positively – and significantly – associated with reduced mortality and improved quality of healthcare

245 provision. This observation is not confined to traditional academic hospital Trusts, it is also seen in  
246 smaller-sized district hospitals, and it appears that improvements in basic yet essential skills and  
247 processes, such as diligent and thorough communication with patients, may contribute to these  
248 observations. Furthermore, the ‘trial’ effect seen in this study is observed beyond patients who  
249 participate in clinical trials, or are just treated, in specific specialties such as colorectal cancer,  
250 cardiology and obstetrics patients.<sup>1,2,16</sup> Here, a positive effect is observed on an organisational level  
251 and it is feedback from patients. The planned inclusion of research as an element of CQC ratings  
252 should aid in driving care provision improvements in healthcare provision across more NHS  
253 organisations by means of increasing clinical research activity. CQC research elements may benefit  
254 from distinguishing between the breadth (number of research studies) and depth (number of  
255 research participants) of clinical research activity to get a true picture of how research can make a  
256 wider impact. Further research, including longitudinal studies, are indicated to monitor if the NIHR-  
257 CQC initiative has an effect on an organisation’s performance, including the staff and inpatient survey  
258 elements identified in this present study.

259

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261

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