2024-04-30

Capturing current research engagement across the South West region: a survey

Anil, Krithka

EDITORIAL: DELIVERING A RESEARCH SKILLED WORKFORCE SPECIAL EDITION

Capturing current research engagement across the South West region: a survey

Krithika Anil[1] Ralph Hammond[2] Rachel Knight Lozano[3] Susie Pearce[4]

[1]Research Fellow, University of Plymouth, Brain Research and Imaging Centre (BRIC) & School of Health Professions, PLYMOUTH, PL4 8AA, UK. [2]Senior Research Fellow, University of Plymouth, Faculty of Health, PLYMOUTH, PL4 8AA, UK. [3] Lecturer in Rehabilitation (Postgraduate Studies), University of Plymouth, School of Health Professions, PLYMOUTH, PL4 8AA, UK. [4] Associate Professor Nursing (Research) University of Plymouth, School of Nursing and Midwifery, PLYMOUTH, PL4 8AA, UK.

Email: krithika.anil@plymouth.ac.uk

Background

One element of the Developing a Research skilled Workforce in the South West work programme was to ask the workforce to complete an online survey. A self-reported survey was constructed to capture the current research engagement across the South West region and map resources that support this research engagement. The survey was distributed via our project's webinar series, the "Developing and Celebrating a Research Skilled Workforce" conference, through the fortnightly e-news bulletin, and contacts in our South West network of health, social care, and scientific professionals.

Results

We received 393 responses. Four areas were found to be underrepresented within the survey: roles, geographical locations, profession, and research identity. These areas may need targeted approaches to promote future engagement within the regional research strategy. The majority of respondents came from a registered professional (n=172), and nursing was the largest profession (n=105).

Discussion

The project is aimed at registered professionals and nursing is generally larger compared to other health and social care professions, so response rate is unsurprising. However, it is surprising that there is large disproportion for location; a majority of responses came from Devon (n=98) and Somerset (n=86). The reason for this is unknown and requires a targeted approach to understand and to equally engage locations across the South West.

A majority of responses were from individuals who self-identified as research aware (n=163), and the least from those who were research inactive (n=28). This may be a consequence of surveyor bias, where those who completed this survey would already be

interested in research and/or conducting research activities. Capturing responses from individuals who are research unaware, or not interested in research, would be valuable to understand their perspectives on their research culture and available research support within their workplace.

The survey included questions about current and desired research support resources. Unsurprisingly, "protected time" within their organisation (n=128) was reported as the most needed resource, while "local research and audit team" (n=142) was reported as the most common current resource. This indicates that most individuals rely on their local research and audit teams to conduct research-related activities rather than engaging in research themselves, due to a lack of time.

Recommendations

A key message from this survey is that the workforce needs protected time to engage in research activities. Implementation of the South West regional research strategy should focus on building infrastructure and support to allow for protected research time while minimising disruptions to service delivery. Next steps would need to build on these results across the South West region by expanding the current resources and proactively engaging the underrepresented professions and locations.

Since we undertook this survey, new resources have become available to support the workforce. This includes an expansion of the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) research training awards schemes, directly aimed at supporting and enabling nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, health scientists, pharmacists to progress their clinical career by expanding their role to include research-related activities (NIHR, 2023). The multi-professional practice-based research capabilities framework provides a means for individuals and managers to map and plan clinical and service evaluation activities and training (NHSE, 2024).

References

NIHR (2023) *Extra £30m a year to boost research careers for healthcare professionals,* Available at https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/extra-30m-a-year-to-boost-research-careers-for-healthcare-professionals/34213 (Accessed 26 April 2024).

NHS England (2024) *Multi-professional practice-based research capabilities framework*, Available at https://advanced-practice.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/research/multi-professional-practice-based-research-capabilities-framework/ (Accessed 26 April 2024).