Nine out of ten people would be willing to take part in clinical research

A new survey conducted on behalf of the National Institute for Health Research Clinical Research Network (NIHR CRN) shows that 89% of people would be willing to take part in clinical research if they were diagnosed with a medical condition or disease – with an all-time-low figure of just 3% saying they would not consider it at all.

The survey also revealed that 95% of people said it was important to them that the NHS carries out clinical research. Last year over 600,000 people took part in research which aims to improve diagnosis, treatment and care of patients in the NHS. The growing importance of clinical research to the general public and their increased willingness to take part suggests that this number is set to rise.

Commenting on the findings of the survey, the NIHR Clinical Research Network’s chief executive, Jonathan Sheffield, said:

“It is important that we make information about clinical research opportunities widely available to NHS patients, through as many routes as we can. This survey shows that people want to participate and we need to ensure they are made aware of the research opportunities available to them. Through our local Clinical Research Networks, we will continue to actively work with all parts of the NHS to promote research opportunities for patients.

“The survey also shows that although 77% of people are aware that clinical research happens in hospitals, they are less informed about opportunities to take part at their local GPs – even though our data shows that one in three GP practices is research active.

“Clinical research happens in the majority of healthcare settings from hospitals to Ambulance Trusts and from Mental Health Trusts to Community Hospitals. I would urge people interested in research to examine all opportunities as anywhere there’s an NHS patient, there should be an opportunity to get involved in research. Part of our role is guiding healthcare professionals to ensure that they are promoting research and we have produced materials to help them do that.”

When asked about motivating factors for taking part in clinical research, nearly half of the people surveyed said that receiving a diagnosis for a medical condition or disease would be a factor most likely to motivate them. One in five said that they would be motivated if a friend or family member was seriously ill and an appropriate treatment had not yet been developed. On this Jonathan Sheffield said:

“It is important to know that many research studies also involve healthy volunteers. We see a lot of carers, friends and family members of patients who are diagnosed with a condition or disease come forward to take part in research. It can be reassuring for them to be able to contribute something which could help a loved one. Research gives people the opportunity to affect future care, whether they are affected themselves or not and patients can find that very empowering.”
Simon Denegri, NIHR National Director for Patients and the public and Chair, INVOLVE said:

“Patients, carers and their families want to see their local NHS carrying out research to improve care and they want to help to make this happen. That is clear from this survey as well as the hundreds of thousands of people who volunteer every year to take part in clinical research.

“Our hospitals and GP surgeries need to be making information readily available to patients so that they know it's ‘OK to ask’ about research. The research we do with patients today is the quality care that our NHS will deliver tomorrow.”

Minister for Life Sciences George Freeman said:

“The NHS provides a unique setting for the development of new treatments that can bring real benefits to patients. We have world class research facilities and it is clear that patients want the opportunity to take part in clinical trials. Ensuring that the NHS continues to embrace research will help us realise our ambition of making the NHS is the best health service in the world.”

Patients interested in research can visit: www.crn.nihr.ac.uk/can-help/patients-carers-public/ to find out more about taking part and see what research is happening in their local area.