Designing a hospital observational study involving lay researchers: the methodological challenges

ABSTRACT

PERFECTED is a 5-year (2013-18), Alzheimer Society supported, NIHR funded programme aimed at improving hospital care for hip-fracture patients with dementia. One phase of PERFECTED involves physically observing care-practices on Orthogeriatric wards at three locations: Norwich, Nottingham and Bradford. Observation is a well-established qualitative method used to understand cultures, processes and interactions in defined locations. Because the approach does not fit the dominant biomedical research model, difficulties can be encountered in obtaining ethical and governance approval for such medical studies. This poster summarises the issues addressed in obtaining approval to conduct the aforementioned observational study that additionally involves lay researchers.

Observational research in acute hospital settings: what are the issues and how can they be addressed?

Simply watching day-to-day events would seem a low risk venture. Yet for research it raises significant issues: infringement of privacy, the unpredictability of who enters the observed space and how to take informed consent. Hospitals are private spaces, a place of work and somewhere that intimate and personal events occur. Also, in our study, lay members of the public are assisting in the observations. Public/patient involvement is central to the entire PERFECTED programme.

Lay observers will bring a distinctive gaze to the observation study. To facilitate their role it is important to:

- Provide appropriate training prior to becoming observers.
- Acquire university and NHS research contracts, explain what this entails and what is expected.
- Emphasise why public/patient involvement is vital.
- Provide support during and after observations.
- Provide adequate recompense

For the research design it is crucial to clearly define:

- Methodological framework.
- The spaces to be observed.
- Who and what are being observed and why.
- How consent will be taken from the “main characters”.
- How awareness will be raised for “incidental others”.
- What difficulties could occur and how these will be resolved.
- How resulting data will be analysed.

For more information about this research please visit:

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