

NEWS RELEASE

GPs urge patients to ask about research opportunities

GPs in the South West are encouraging their patients to ask about research opportunities at their local practice.

The call comes following the results of a recent online survey carried out by the Clinical Research Network South West Peninsula (CRN SWP), part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), which showed nearly half of those surveyed did not know they can take part in research at their local GP practice.

The survey, carried out earlier this month, revealed that whilst 51% were aware that research studies and clinical trials are being carried out in primary care locally, 49% were not.

During the last financial year, nearly 3,300 people took part in research within a primary care setting across the South West – but local experts want to see even more taking up the opportunity.

Dr Paul McEleny, Clinical Research Lead for Primary Care for the CRN SWP, said: “The nature of the health challenges facing the UK means that GPs, in partnership with patients and carers, have a crucial role to play in developing treatments of patient benefit. That over 3,000 people locally last year volunteered to participate in clinical studies is a mark of how successful this partnership has become but we want to see many more people coming forward and helping us to do more life-changing, and sometimes life-saving, work. Research cannot happen without you, so please ask you GP what research is going on that might be of benefit, not only to you, but future generations.”

The South West has 145 research-active practices with 64 in Devon; 33 in Somerset; 31 in Cornwall; and 17 in Plymouth.

Research in GP practices can include a range of activities, from taking part in drug trials to patients completing a questionnaire about their health.

Dr Daniel Murphy, GP partner at Honiton Surgery and Rheumatologist at Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, is currently running his own research study, PISCES, into back pain in young adults.

“Our study is in the often overlooked area of back pain; we know that back pain accounts for 75% of work absence in the UK, and is the 2nd most common reason for young patients to contact their GP,” he said. “Back pain is a significant cause of disability which we are keen to reduce.

“Most back pain is described as being mechanical, and usually due to muscle strain. Around 1 in 10 young patients have back pain due to a different cause; this is inflammatory back pain, and is due to our immune system, which usually fights off infection, becoming activated when it shouldn’t and causing inflammation within the joints of the spine. We don’t really understand how many young people with back pain are getting symptoms for this reason, though we do know that diagnosis of this type of pain is difficult and can take a long time – on average patients with inflammatory back pain have symptoms for six years before they are diagnosed.

“Our study is attempting to work out how many people seeing their GP with back pain might have inflammatory back pain. GPs are using a special set of questions to help identify patients with this type of pain. This will help us understand how common inflammatory back pain is, and help GPs identify this type of pain earlier.”

There are many other studies being carried out at GP practices in the South West including those looking at support services for parents; identifying and managing frailty within primary care; differences in diabetes progression and early arthritis.

This month the CRN SWP, in collaboration with GP practices across the region, launched its Patient Research Experience Survey, asking those who have taken part in research at their local practice in the last year to provide feedback on their experience.

The results of the survey will be shared early next year.

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