

# Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network

The Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network (NICRN) supports clinical research in Northern Ireland by providing an infrastructure that allows high-quality clinical research to take place across the entire Health and Social Care (HSC) setting, so that patients can benefit from new and better treatments.

**NICRN works with patients to ensure their needs are at the centre of all research activity.**



**NICRN helps researchers to set up clinical studies quickly and effectively, reducing barriers to research.**



**NICRN provides health professionals with research training to establish an active, research-ready workforce.**



**NICRN supports the life-sciences industry to deliver their research programmes, facilitating high-quality, complex research studies.**



# The NICRN aims to improve

**The ability of patients and healthcare professionals to participate in and benefit from clinical research**



**The quality of clinical research undertaken within the HSC**



**The speed of delivering research outcomes and potential benefits**



**Regional coordination of clinical research and data across trusts, academia and UK administrations**



**The further integration of clinical research within HSC structures and services**



## **AIM 1: Improve the ability of patients and health care professionals to participate in and benefit from clinical research**

Since the NICRN was established in 2008 we have transformed the environment for clinical research in the HSC. All five trusts and a quarter of all general practices in Northern Ireland are conducting research studies annually, demonstrating a real commitment to research at the core of the HSC.

During this time more than 90,000 patients have volunteered to take part in HSC clinical research, providing evidence that patients think research is important and are therefore prepared to commit to it.

In 2018, the NICRN will deliver over 200 high quality clinical research studies across different clinical specialties, providing access to twice as many research studies in Northern Ireland compared to seven years ago.

The research we deliver is funded by research grant providers, NHS/HSC organisations, charities, and the life-sciences industry. This research activity makes an important contribution to improving the health of the Northern Ireland population and supporting economic growth.

*"We found working with the NICRN Nurse excellent. The original site recruitment target ... has far surpassed all expectations. Data quality has also been excellent. The [study] Steering Committee comprising of Professors of Cardiovascular medicine and Interventional medicine along with the Sponsor representative have highly praised the NICRN Nurse. [Nurse] has been instrumental in ensuring the smooth running of a complex trial which has involved several levels of care (ambulance, emergency department, coronary care and cath lab). [Nurse's] work has been hugely valuable. Thank you so much for fantastic work!"*

**Feedback from a major pharmaceutical and life sciences company working with NICRN (Cardiovascular)**

Median time  
from application  
to approval

**30 days**

Over  
**90,000**  
patients have  
volunteered to take  
part in clinical  
research

## **AIM 2: Improve the quality of clinical research undertaken within the HSC**

Our network covers the whole of Northern Ireland, working in all five HSC trusts and primary care, setting up and delivering only the highest quality research across different clinical specialties and providing enormous benefit for patients.

Our commitment to improving research capability within the HSC means that an increasing number of complex, interventional studies are now able to take place.

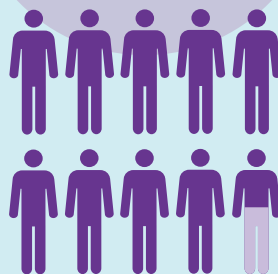
We prioritise support for the clinical specialties which have shown that they can bring together communities of clinical practice to provide a local research expertise, as well as linking with national research networks.

## **Ground-breaking Alzheimer's trial available to patients across Northern Ireland**

NICRN is supporting a UK-wide trial to investigate whether a drug normally used to treat high blood pressure could also slow down the progression of Alzheimer's Disease.

The multi-centre clinical trial is being led by the University of Bristol in partnership with Queen's University Belfast, University of Cambridge and the University of London with funding from the National Institute for Health Research and Medical Research Council. The trial known as RADAR (Reducing pathology in Alzheimer's Disease through Angiotensin taRgeting), is hoping to recruit approximately 230 participants across the UK including at least 10 in Northern Ireland, together with a similar number of carers.

Over  
**95%**  
recruitment to target in  
primary care, respiratory  
conditions, dementia,  
diabetes and  
cardiovascular disease



### AIM 3: Improve the speed of delivering research outcomes and potential benefit

We support researchers, HSC trusts and industry to remove barriers to research and reduce the time it takes to get approval for research in the HSC. Since 2016 the median time for approval for research in an HSC trust has been 30 days from receipt of application. We have proved our ability to deliver, achieving over 95% 'recruitment to target' in the areas of primary care research and research into

respiratory conditions, dementia, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

We have also been working with the direct clinical care team to make sure screening procedures are as efficient as possible. As a result, the ratio of screened to recruited patients has reduced from 9:1 in 2014/15 to less than 4:1 in 2016/17, making much more efficient use of patient and staff time.

#### Fewer patients screened for every one recruited



### AIM 4: Improve regional coordination of clinical research and data across trusts, academia and the UK administrations

Our Coordinating Centre provides support to ensure effective management and coordination of regional research activity, and good communication and connectivity between the stakeholders. Experienced academic researchers with a track record

of delivering high quality research in the HSC are supported by research-active clinicians, specialist research nurses and practitioners, research administrators and patients to prioritise and deliver important research.

*"... it was a pleasure to visit your site. Thank you and your team so much for your demonstrable professionalism, availability, dedication to the study and excellent adherence and knowledge of the protocol, procedures and good clinical practice.... The source files and data were excellent.... [NICRN coordinator] has been wonderful in filing and checking documents sent to her and I thank her especially for her eye to detail, quick action and pertinent questions."*

**Feedback from an external company working with NICRN (Respiratory Health)**

## AIM 5: Improve the further integration of clinical research within HSC structures and services

Our role in developing and delivering research has enhanced the depth of skill and specialist knowledge that now sits at the centre of the HSC. Over 200 specialist clinicians, nurses, practitioners, administrators and patient representatives/advocates, across all five trusts and more than 80 general practices are actively involved in research so that the HSC is 'research ready'.

We are working to develop close links with the pharmaceutical industry and clinical research organisations to allow more effective collaborative working and to increase clinical trial activity in Northern Ireland. Our staff also act as patient advocates within the research process, making sure the research we support reflects the priorities of patients and their families.

*"One of the major challenges to ensuring the successful and timely completion of this research project was the recruitment of healthcare professionals from primary care. The support provided by [NICRN Nurse] and her team with the recruitment process has been tremendous. The NICRN team's excellent reputation meant that primary care practitioners were willing to receive further information about our project and for those who subsequently took part in the research; their past positive experience in working with the NICRN team was often an important influencing factor. Even where difficulties were encountered in recruiting practitioners, the NICRN team persevered until the required number of participants had been successfully recruited. It has been an absolute pleasure to have worked with the NICRN team on this project and I am very grateful to the team for its support."*

**Feedback from an academic researcher working with NICRN (Primary Care)**



Find out more about what NICRN can do for you in areas such as funding, training, recruitment and coordination.

You can contact the NICRN coordinating centre: Phone: +44 (0) 28 9063 6360

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