

an effective collaboration in Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)

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Background

The Cambridge Clinical Research Facility (CRF) is in close proximity to the local University Technical College (UTC). For the students of Year 13 the curriculum includes 'Challenge Projects'. These are designed to give young people the opportunity to experience science and technology by working closely with local employers - in real work environments. Projects are developed to be relevant to both employer and student and run over 9 weeks.

The NIHR Cambridge BRC PPI Lead and the NIHR Cambridge CRF have collaborated closely with the UTC to deliver an effective 'Challenge Project' in health research for and with the students.

Aim

The underlying goal of a 'Challenge Project' is for the students to develop practical skills such as teamwork, leadership and presentation skills to prepare them for the scientific work force.

The project involving the CRF set the students the challenge to:

- explore with their 16 – 17 year old peers their understanding of how young people and their experiences with their families affects the concepts of assent and consent
- report their findings in a scientific poster
- have an opportunity to experience what it is like to take part as a healthy volunteer in health research

Process and Method

30 students received seminars on research ethics, both quantitative and qualitative research methods and about patient and public involvement to give them an insight to what researchers in health must consider whilst designing and conducting their research study.

The students were split into focus groups with peers, discussing whether they felt competent to make the decision on consent

The students created scientific posters and presented their work and prizes were given for the best poster.

To conclude the students experience and new knowledge, they were offered the opportunity to be a healthy volunteer in a metabolic research study on the NIHR Cambridge CRF which involved an overnight stay in a calorimeter room.

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Findings: Students views on consent:

The majority of students agreed that consent in research meant that research participants have agreed to partake in an activity they fully understood.

Participants were also clear that they wanted to be asked for consent in a way that was respectful, understandable, and informed.

Overall, the challenge project students left with 'mixed feelings' whether they felt, at their age, consent for medical research was suitable without a parent's 'ok' if it involved more than a questionnaire or access to medical records.

60% of students from the UTC student cohort became healthy volunteers in our metabolic research study.



"I think it means that you actually have a choice of whether you want to do something or not. So, if you want to participate in something you can and if you don't, you don't, it's completely up to you." (Student from UTC)

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The CRF contribution

The opportunity for students to be actively involved in health research would not have been possible without the CRF working so closely with Cambridge UTC and the BRC PPI lead

The CRF contributed by:

- being present at initial project meetings with the students
- delivering teaching sessions to students
- providing data to the project collaborators
- being included in the judging panel at the students' poster presentation event
- coordinating the study participant visits for the students
- facilitating the overnight metabolic research study including undertaking a range of body composition measurements



Conclusion

The information gained from the students' findings will be used to give the researcher community further insight about ethical considerations related to assent and consent among young people.

This new CRF collaboration with URC and the Cambridge BRC has been very effective. The 'Challenge Project' has contributed to mutual awareness across the participating organisations and amongst young people in Cambridge.

The programme has proven to be a valuable component in developing the skills in students, both theoretically and practically in a scientific workforce in particular health research.