



More about the Mental Health Research Network

The Mental Health Research Network (MHRN) is part of the National Institute for Health Research and our mission is to help make research about mental health happen within the NHS in England.

We work with everyone who needs to be involved in research projects – researchers, mental health professionals, people with experience of mental health problems, their families, and research and development staff based in NHS trusts.

We introduce research teams to people with experience of mental health problems who are interested in advising or collaborating on research studies as well as their family members. We also put researchers in touch with mental health professionals who may be interested in being collaborators or investigators on a project.

We work with about 60 NHS trusts running community-based and specialist services for people with mental health problems. We can help research teams organise local permissions and paperwork needed to arrange collaborations and recruit participants via NHS services.

We employ teams of clinical studies officers who work in NHS trusts and help recruit participants to MHRN-supported studies. We can advise on electronic data capture and have a team of e-science officers who are experts on systems used by NHS trusts throughout England. e-science officers can also help research teams set up websites to tell people about their projects, or to use for research purposes.

To find out more about what we do,
visit our website, www.mhrn.info

How family members can help make your research better

Sometimes a research proposal that makes sense on paper may in practice make unrealistic or unreasonable demands on participants. It may be hard to spot that unless you have personal experience of mental health problems yourself, or experience as a carer.

Family members and friends who support someone with a mental health problem can give researchers that real-life perspective gained from first-hand experience.

They can help researchers plan studies that take account of, and are respectful to the needs of people with different mental health problems. They can offer practical suggestions on where, how and with whom a particular piece of research can be done.

FACTOR can introduce you to family members willing to get involved in your research.



Tips for involving carers in research

- Do brief carers properly before meetings with professionals.
- Do send carers written information – the research proposal, the protocol, a lay summary, for example.
- Don't have a lone carer representative in mainly professional meetings – two carers are much more effective than one.
- Two carer representatives plus a reserve is better still – this is an opportunity for both researchers and carers to learn how involvement works.
- Don't drown your carer representatives in fast-moving technical jargon – arrange separate meetings for carers so that issues can be thoroughly explained and discussed.
- Don't expect carers to be able to travel long distances – they have commitments at home.
- Do speak with carer representatives between meetings – find out what they are thinking and what they need.

FACTOR stands for Families/Friends and Carers Together in Research and was set up by the Mental Health Research Network, which is part of the National Institute for Health Research.

FACTOR's members are relatives and friends of people with mental health problems and are interested in research. They come from a variety of backgrounds and live all over England. They are willing to share their expertise and knowledge to help make research proposals more relevant and research design more realistic.

If you're looking for carer representatives or collaborators for your project, FACTOR can put you in touch with people who live in your area.

We can help you find carer representatives anywhere in England. Our network includes family members and friends who have specific experience and knowledge of a range of mental health problems.

You can ask one of our Carer Reference Groups to discuss and comment on your research proposal, ongoing project or initial idea.

There are two FACTOR Carer Reference Groups that meet monthly – one is based in London, the other in Coventry. You can come to a meeting and talk to the members of a Group in person, or, if you are based further afield, you can send us your idea, project or proposal in writing. Researchers working anywhere in England can ask for input from our Carer Reference Groups.

We can help you organise one-off consultations with carers.

One-off consultations are a good way of involving carers who cannot commit to ongoing meetings. We can help you set these up and we can invite members of FACTOR to attend.

To find out more about FACTOR and how we can help you...

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She is based in the Mental Health Research Network's coordinating centre at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London.

