

Patient and Public Involvement in Research: *Mentoring in Practice*

People using health and social care services, as well as the wider public, are increasingly taking up roles as Public Contributors in health research. We guess that this works best when there is a good relationship between one researcher and one PPI representative, and this relationship is nurtured within a supportive wider context. This might be seen as a mentoring relationship¹. Test yours by asking the following questions.

Aspect	Questions to consider
Finding a researcher	1a What level of understanding does the researcher need in (a) the health issue; (b) how the NHS works and how change happens; (c) research methods; and (d) how to offer appropriate support? 1b Is the researcher at the right level of seniority in the university? 1c Are there personal qualities that you are seeking? 1d How does the researcher's line manager view the arrangement?
Finding a Public Contributor	2a What experience and skills does the person need to have? Does this include specific experience of a health condition, academic abilities and skills in presentation and contributing to meetings? 2b What about qualities such as curiosity and interest in others?
Benefits for the Public Contributor	3a Are you able to speak about your own health or personal issues? 3b Do you reflect on your personal experience of health services and how they can be improved? 3c Do you learn about the research topic or research methods? 3d Is this a safe place to explore your personal reactions to being involved in PPI activities?
Benefits for the researcher	4a How will you learn about the PPI rep's real life experience of illness or disability and how the healthcare system responded? 4b How will you check out how common the rep's experience is amongst others who have similar issues? 4c What will you share with your research colleagues?
Values	5a Do you share the same values in relation to the importance of PPI input, the nature of evidence, the purpose of publication and the priority of service improvement?
Practical arrangements	6a Where and when will meetings take place? Is it a 'power neutral' place where both of you feel safe and comfortable? 6b How will you stay in touch between formal meetings? 6c Will the PPI rep be paid any money and how will this work? 6d Will the arrangements and a record of meetings be written down and read by anyone else? 6e Will the arrangement be reviewed from time to time?
Hazards	7a What could go wrong, put people at risk or leave either of you feeling 'out of your depth'? How will resolve your differences? 7b Under what circumstances will you pass on personal information about the PPI rep or the researcher to anyone else? 7c How will you protect the distinctive contribution of the PPI rep and avoid turning them into a researcher? 7d How will you recognise the end and say goodbye?

ⁱ In 2016, North West Coast CLAHRC have established a formal mentoring scheme for public contributors holding governance roles, with university and partner staff with experience of governance roles, and mentees taking part in formal training to support the pairings over a six month period.