

How to guide

How to identify your skills for involvement

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Introduction

This simple checklist has been written to prompt reflection on the areas of knowledge and skill that you may wish to develop through your involvement.

There are four things to hold in mind while looking at the list below.

- a. None of these things are essential – you can make a valuable contribution even if you feel that you have less to offer than some other people.
- b. Nobody has to develop their skills – these are invitations rather than demands. If you are content with the level of skill you have at present, then that is fine.
- c. Lots of help is available from other places for some of these competencies. For example, a local college may offer courses on literacy and numeracy (competence #5). But other items on the list are more like gifts that you either have or haven't got, such as your ability to spot jargon (competence #2), or they are just a part of your personal history (competence #1). The list simply helps you to focus on what you already bring, and what you might like to develop.

- d. The whole team needs to make 'reasonable adjustments' to enable others to be involved. For example, rather than demand someone has the ability to climb stairs to your committee room on the first floor, the meeting should be moved to a room on the ground floor. So, while it is good to reflect on how you can develop your own competencies, sometimes other people need to take action to make sure you can 'come as you are'.

Competencies for involvement

With these considerations in mind, here is a list of eleven skills that may be helpful for getting involved. You don't need all of these skills for all activities and each of them can develop from basic to advanced levels. They are:

1. Personal, lived experience of the health condition or social issue that is under consideration, along with the ability to reflect on how your personal experience may be similar – and different – to that of other people in similar circumstances.
2. Awareness of ordinary life, so that you can point out jargon, spot things that the public might see, and help researchers, clinicians and managers become more relevant. At the beginning of your involvement, you bring a 'fresh pair of eyes' to the team and your first impressions can be very valuable, but this tends to lessen over time.
3. Learning and creativity, so you can absorb and analyse information and then generate new ideas and solutions. This might include ideas for new research projects or service improvements.
4. Self-confidence and assertiveness, so you can offer your ideas, experiences and opinions to others in a helpful way.
5. Literacy and numeracy, so you can write about your experiences, and read and respond to papers that are sent to you. You may also have computer skills.
6. Public speaking, which may be just taking your turn to speak in a small group, or giving presentations to larger audiences.
7. Committee and groupwork skills, so you can help meetings and public consultations to run effectively.
8. Representation, so that you can find out and promote the opinions and interests of a specific group.

9. Leadership and change, so you can act politically to achieve long-term and sustained improvements in the wider community.
10. Knowledge of the NHS and social care, so you can help to get the improvements adopted by the health service and its partners.
11. Research methods, so that you can provide a positive challenge and perhaps some new ideas to the people designing research studies.

Self Assessment

You might like to draw out a table like the one below and work with a colleague to fill in the cells in order to gain an idea of where you would like to make progress. At the end, put the next steps in priority order.

Competence	What's good now?	Next steps
1. <i>Lived experience</i>		
2. <i>Fresh eyes</i>		
3. <i>Learning and creativity</i>		
4. <i>Assertiveness</i>		
5. <i>Literacy and numeracy</i>		
6. <i>Public speaking</i>		
7. <i>Committee skills</i>		
8. <i>Representation</i>		
9. <i>Leadership and change</i>		
10. <i>Knowledge of NHS</i>		
11. <i>Research methods</i>		

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