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Media Release

Study aims to reduce unnecessary acute hospital admissions

A collaborative study led by the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry (PCMD), Plymouth University, at acute admissions sites within four hospitals in the West, is the first that aims to identify how decisions are made and clinical experience is used to minimise the number of unnecessary acute admissions to hospital, with a view to making recommendations for best practice and cost savings across the NHS and beyond.

The study has received funding of £429,000 from the National Institute for Health Research Health Services & Delivery Research programme and will run for 24 months. It is also supported by the NIHR Peninsula Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care.

It is estimated that between six and 20 per cent of emergency medical admissions in the UK could be avoided. Unnecessary admissions are expensive, make inefficient use of the time of medical staff and do not address the needs of the patient – indeed, they can often lead to unwarranted distress.

The research team from PCMD, Plymouth University, the University of the West of England, and the Universities of Bristol and Exeter, will work with acute admissions teams at the Royal United Hospital Bath, and hospitals in Exeter, Gloucester and Plymouth.

Dominic Williamson, Emergency Department Consultant at the RUH, said: “The NHS is facing ever increasing challenges in maintaining high quality care and sufficient capacity to manage patients in hospital and the health community.

“It is vitally important to achieve best practice in the assessment, investigation and treatment of patients whilst avoiding avoidable admissions to hospital. We continually aim to improve quality of care, with the most efficient use of resources available and providing the best value for money.

“There is a distinct lack of research into what best practice looks like and as a result many models of care are developed across the country. This multicentre project will investigate the models of care in four major hospitals across the South West, including the RUH.

“Over the next two years it is hoped that best practice can be defined, resulting in improvements in patient care and better use of resources. The RUH is proud to be at the

centre of such important research and is committed to learn and continually innovate in this essential area of patient care.”

At the RUH in 2011/12, 60,508 patients attended the Emergency Department, with 26,968 being admitted. This compares with 66,228 attendances the previous year, and 25,110 admissions.

The research project will include an analysis of wider health care systems, including care pathways, the role of clinical teams, governance and commissioning. The research team will interview lead clinicians and managers, model patient pathways, and estimate associated costs.

It is hoped that the project will address a paucity of research on the variability of hospital acute admission policies both in place and being developed. Analysis of the results of this research project will help to form recommendations for best practice.

The research team is led by Professor Christian Gericke, Professor of Public Health, PCMD, Deputy Director, NIHR PenCLAHRC and honorary consultant neurologist at South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. He said: “Our research has the potential to improve acute admission services nationwide, make best use of clinical professional skills and expertise and, most importantly, make suggestions for changes to policy that will have direct benefit to patients. We are grateful to our colleagues in Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester and Plymouth for their collaboration on this project.”

Ends

The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry is a joint entity of the University of Exeter, Plymouth University and the NHS in the South West of England. PCMD has created for itself an excellent national and international reputation for groundbreaking research in the areas of diabetes and obesity, neurological disease, child development and ageing, dentistry, clinical education and health technology assessment.

NIHR - PenCLAHRC aims to bring together local universities and their surrounding NHS organisations to test new treatments and new ways of working in specific clinical areas, to see if they are effective and appropriate for everyday use in the health service. Where potential improvements are identified PenCLAHRC helps NHS staff to incorporate them into their everyday working practices, so that patients across the local community receive a better standard of healthcare.

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is funded by the Department of Health to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. Since its establishment in April 2006, the NIHR has transformed research in the NHS. It has increased the volume of applied health research for the benefit of patients and the public, driven faster translation of basic science discoveries into tangible benefits for patients and the economy, and developed and supported the people who conduct and contribute to applied health research. The NIHR plays a key role in the Government's strategy for economic growth, attracting investment by the life-sciences industries through its world-class infrastructure for health research. Together, the NIHR people, programmes, centres of excellence and systems represent the most integrated health research system in the world. For further information, visit the NIHR website (www.nihr.ac.uk).