

Lessons Learned: Researching in Hospitals

How should I approach clinical staff participating in the study?

Before

- Participants should be recruited indirectly through available communication channels, rather than on-the-ground in the hospital
- Exchange contact details with the participant beforehand in case of last minute change of circumstances
- Familiarise yourself with hospital layout
- Make sure your name badge is clearly visible
- Carry your letter of access and/or security pass
- Visually distinguish yourself from clinicians (e.g. wear a t-shirt saying 'researcher')
- Turn off your mobile phone
- If you are interviewing staff, check to see if the area is busy and try to find a quieter, more confidential space nearby if necessary
- If you are shadowing a staff member explain that you may leave at any time if they are busy or dealing with an emergency and that they do not need to come and find you
- Have a good understanding of medical terminology, e.g.
 - staff grades and responsibilities
 - difference between in- and out-patients
 - out-of-hours, on call
 - medical/surgical

During

- Introduce yourself
- Provide a clear explanation of your role, e.g.
 - research institution
 - project funding source
 - non-clinical status
- Check participant's understanding of your role in the hospital context, e.g.
 - who will see the data you collect
 - your relationship with their line management and hospital management
- Adapt to their circumstances and requirements
- Be prepared to explain what you are recording and how you are using data collection devices

After

- Say thank you for the time and insight provided by the participant
- Offer to follow up later in the project and/or share copies of relevant study material
- Be polite and punctual, finishing when agreed

How should I behave in clinical areas?

- Ensure infection control rules are followed, e.g.
 - bare below elbows
 - hair up
 - hand washing/sanitisation

- If you are not accompanied by a staff member introduce yourself to the ward manager so your presence is accounted for (other staff or the receptionist can help you find the ward manager)
- Be generally aware of Trust protocols, e.g.
 - Confidentiality
- Keep at a distance, so as not to disturb clinicians, when they're with patients or colleagues
- Hospitals operate like semi-private spaces, so you'll need to make decisions about whether your presence is appropriate on a case-by-case basis
- Do not collect data about second order participants (e.g. patients) who have not consented to be part of the research
- It is not appropriate to capture images, video or audio in hospitals

What should I do if there's a clinical emergency?

- Remove yourself from the situation if you feel uncomfortable, don't worry about informing anyone if they are occupied (they should be expecting you to possibly leave without warning)
- Follow any instructions directed at you
- Talk through what happened afterwards with the participant if this is possible
- Seek support afterwards to help understand the experience and your reaction

What attitudes from clinicians towards the research am I likely to encounter?

- Prior to conducting any research, consider whether it could be seen as a potential threat to the status quo and how these concerns could be allayed
- Staff may want to know about the precise nature of the data, who owns it and who might see it and you should be prepared to justify your answers
- You may need to provide assurances that the research will not negatively impact on existing systems or generate additional work for clinical staff
- Managers might challenge anonymity if they consider it prevents them from responding to situations uncovered by the research
- Staff may potentially change their behaviour, in the knowledge that they are being observed; you need to counter this possibility, to avoid negative impact on patient care