

Webinars: an insider's view

The first time I heard the word 'webinar' I automatically thought it was something to do with spiders. As I'm not a great fan of arachnids, I was relieved to find that a webinar is a sort of seminar held by virtue of the World Wide Web.

My first experience of a webinar was being invited to join one via a link in an email. Through this link I registered for the webinar and I was then told to download a simple application for my iPad to get me in. All rather simple and yet my scepticism kept me wondering whether this would actually work. Nearer to the time of the webinar I received email reminders and at the allotted time I logged in using the unique identification code I was sent on registering. Low and behold, I was taken to the 'app'. It loaded and all of a sudden I was viewing a PowerPoint presentation and listening to the presenter talk this through. The advantage of webinars is that you don't have to travel to them; in fact I was comfortably seated on my sofa with a cuppa. You can come and go without embarrassment as no one can see you. Yet it is possible to take part by voting or asking questions. So a webinar can be interactive too.

When I was invited to take part in a webinar for INVOLVE, at first I didn't realise I would be appearing in it! INVOLVE joined forces with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Social Care Research (SSCR) at the London School of Economics (LSE) to hold their first webinar on Friday 13 September 2013. The theme for the day was public involvement in social care research, featuring me as a survivor researcher, Simon Denegri, Chair of INVOLVE and NIHR National Director for Public Participation and Engagement in Research, and Mike Clark, Research Programme Manager of the SSCR. So, we called the webinar 'Get all sides of the story'. We had all prepared PowerPoint presentations to talk to, and I had worked with Helen Hayes, Senior Public Involvement Advisor

at INVOLVE, to put together some slides showing critical things to remember when involving people in research. We also showcased some good examples from the 'Turning the pyramid upside down: examples of public involvement in social care research' report (www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/posttypepublication/turning-the-pyramid-upside-down-examples-of-public-involvement-in-social-care-research/).

On the day, Simon, Mike and I took turns presenting to our unseen audience in front of an enormous flat screen TV, which was weird to start with. Even weirder, we could see ourselves as there was a video camera seated on top of the TV, and we could also view our slides. We had the vital technical assistance of the LSE team to move the camera from us to the presentation and back again for those viewing the webinar. INVOLVE staff were ensconced in the corner out of view, taking questions from emails and tweets. Less technical little pieces of paper passed hands and we ended with a discussion on the questions the audience posed. The hour went quickly in the end and the whole event was enjoyable even if a little nerve-racking to begin with.



The webinar I took part in was the first in a series of themed webinars that INVOLVE are producing. A second webinar on the topic of research with black and minority ethnic people using social care services took place on 20 January 2014. If you can't 'attend' the webinars, INVOLVE are adding the presentations to their website for viewing any time, along with all the questions and answers (www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/posttypenews/nihr-school-for-social-care-research-and-involve-webinar-series-2/).

Whilst there is no substitute for face-to-face contact, webinars offer another mode of getting a message across in an accessible format if you can afford and access the kit. They

can be part of a portfolio of communications methods that organisations, and indeed user groups, can use to get their message across. All power to the web!