# INVOLVE

**NHS National Institute for Health Research**

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## Example 2: Salford Research and Development (R+D) and National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Greater Manchester Primary Care Patient Safety Translational Research Centre (GM PCPSTRC)

**Using Twitter to find people to involve in a research advisory group**

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### About the research

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Greater Manchester Primary Care Patient Safety Translational Research Centre (GM PCPSTRC) is a partnership between the University of Manchester and Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust. The Centre has a strong commitment to patient and public involvement. As part of this commitment it has a Research User Group, which advises on and helps to shape the research of the Centre. Philip Hammond coordinates patient and public involvement in Research and Development (R+D) at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust and at the GMPCPSTRC.

### How have people been involved?

The Research User Group (RUG) consists of 12 members who have been recruited via a variety of traditional and non-traditional recruitment methods in order to involve a wide range of people, including people who hadn't previously been actively involved in research.

The GM PCPSTRC and the Trust each have an active Twitter account, and the decision was made to use Twitter as well as more traditional methods to recruit new members to the RUG, because Philip had already used Twitter a lot and knew it worked. He had considered using Facebook to involve people but ruled it out – the Trust had previously taken a corporate decision not to use it because of the risks attached (for more information on risks and risk management see Section 7 of the guidance).

Philip sent a range of tweets about the opportunity to join the RUG, using the Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust R+D Team's twitter account (@SalfordRD) and engaging with the owner/operator of the GMPCPSTRC twitter account (@gm_pstrc). The Salford R+D account has over 700 followers, so this enables the Trust to reach a lot of people, for example, 64 tweets were sent from @SalfordRD in one week. These were mentioned four times in tweets by other people, which reached over 3,000 followers. And re-tweets reached a further 7,600 people.

Philip is also using Twitter for quick opinion gathering (e.g. what did you think of this article, what do you think our number one research priority should be?) and to alert people to opportunities for involvement.

## What resources were involved?

Using Twitter to involve people requires no additional budget and little time commitment - Philip spends between 15 and 30 minutes per day managing the Salford R+D account. He uses an application called tweetdeck to schedule tweets, so that they go out through the day rather than all at once.

## The impact of using social media

Philip received a really good number and range of applications from people who wanted to join the Research User Group. It's hard to say this was directly as a result of Twitter, but it is likely that this was the case. Three new people have now been appointed to the Research User Group, two of whom had never been actively involved in research before.

## The future

There are plans to continue to build the Twitter following at Salford R+D, and to continue to use it to engage and involve people.

## Advice to other researchers about using social media to actively involve people in research

"As with any form of public involvement, there is no single method that will suit everyone. You need to have a portfolio of techniques to involve a range of people, and social media is one of these. For example, if you only advertise opportunities for involvement in the Trust's membership newsletter, you will only manage to involve those people who read it and are already engaged in health services. Social media enables you to reach a wider range of people including those sometimes referred to as "hard-to-reach" – it doesn't replace existing methods.

"If you're new to Twitter, lurk and listen. Don't expect instant gratification. Watch what people are saying, then start with a few re-tweets. The more things you have to say, the more followers you will accrue.

"It's a relatively new method, but it's becoming more important. It enables you to reach a wider range of people.   But if you ask people for their views via social media (or in any other way), ensure you act on them."

Philip Hammond, Patient and Public Involvement Coordinator, Salford R+D and NIHR Greater Manchester PCPSTRC

**Reference:** INVOLVE (2014) Examples of the use of social media for active public involvement - Salford Research and Development (R+D) and National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Greater Manchester Primary Care Patient Safety Translational Research Centre (GM PCPSTRC): Using Twitter to find people to involve in a research advisory group