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## **Example 9: Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) West Midlands**

**Using an interactive website to involve people in dialogues about CLAHRC research**

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### **About the CLAHRC online platform**

The Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Programme at the [Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care \(CLAHRC\) West Midlands](#) involves members of the public as PPI advisors. This is a formal role that can be time consuming, and to become involved in this way people have to complete an application form and be interviewed. If successful they are then asked to sit on, for example, a research management group or steering group. The CLAHRC wanted to develop a way to involve a broader range of people, who could choose how much or how little to be involved depending on the time they had available.

They are therefore developing an online forum called 'CLAHRC Voices West Midlands'. The aim is to enable online collaboration between the CLAHRC and members of the public with an interest in/experience of health-related research and service improvement. Everyone who signs up to the platform (it is a closed, by invitation only, group) is asked in which of the CLAHRC strands of work they are interested. This enables them to take part in online discussions about research.

It is envisaged that the platform will facilitate two-way dialogue, feedback and polls and will enable researchers to better communicate the impact of PPI in research.

The platform is initially being developed for the use of CLAHRC West Midlands to:

- enable platform users to create their own profile with specific interests to ensure contact is user-controlled, filtered and targeted
- contact platform users for feedback via polls, questionnaires, and discussion forums
- identify platform users or groups to become more intensely involved in specific projects that interest them
- disseminate information to request feedback, advertise learning opportunities, share information, post regular blogs and podcasts, and so on
- test out CLAHRC-developed public engagement with science tools
- develop public facing dissemination materials, including plain English summaries.

It is hoped that the platform will reach a wide range of people, which in turn should free up resources to reach seldom-heard groups. The platform will go live after a period of testing by CLAHRC staff and service users. Once fully developed and piloted, it has the potential to be used by other organisations in the West Midlands and possibly nationally.

One member of research staff from each of the CLAHRC research themes is now being trained to use the platform. They will moderate information related to their theme, and will have editing rights, be able to create events and initiate discussions. Success of the platform will depend upon regular engagement by staff from each of the four service themes to set up projects and activities on the platform workspace. The fifth section on the platform 'Open Forum' will be managed by the PPI team and will serve to look at wider issues in the local health and social care landscape.

### **What were the challenges?**

CLAHRC West Midlands was originally working to design and set up their own online platform by working with a local community engagement organisation. A period of testing by citizens, patients and service users as well as CLAHRC academics and individuals from service partners was carried out. This informed decisions regarding what content and features to include and helped to ensure that the platform was user-friendly. After the introduction of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Google Hub, it was agreed that CLAHRC Voices West Midlands will be situated on the Hub, which is a new collaboration workspace that is being made available for everyone working in NIHR initiatives.

Another challenge is resources; it will take time to moderate the platform and to make it interesting, so that people want to get involved. It may also be a challenge to get researchers to use the platform.

### **The impact of using social media**

It's too early to say what impact the platform will have. It will be evaluated as part of the CLAHRC West Midlands Implementation Science theme.

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

"Try to do it as simply and as easily as possible, and with as few resources as you can. Don't invest lots of money as there are often cheaper ways to do it.

"You need everyone (researchers and members of the public) to sign up to terms and conditions before they can take part.

"Researchers need to be trained in the use of social media as it's not a skill everyone has."

Jo Sartori, CLAHRC West Midlands

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**Reference:** INVOLVE (2014) Examples of the use of social media for active public involvement: Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research (CLAHRC) West Midlands: Using an interactive website to involve people in dialogues about CLAHRC research