Health Services Research Network
Annual review 2008/09

The Health Services Research Network is dedicated to the promotion of health services research. Established in 2005, it is a UK-wide membership network for organisations involved, or with an interest in, health services research. The Network acts as the voice for the health services research community and works to bridge the gap between research, management and policy.

This review briefly describes who we are, our main activities and achievements over the year and our plans for the coming year.

Year at a glance

- Produced a briefing for members summarising key elements of Professor Lord Darzi’s final report of his NHS Next Stage Review and provided a compendium to other commentary.
- Secured a position on the UK Health Innovation Council (HIC).
- Produced the briefing Making sense of the innovation landscape.
- Met with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and secured a place on the NHS Evidence oversight committee.
- Continued to have our voice heard through our representatives on the national bodies National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Advisory Board, UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) and the Connecting for Health (CfH) Research Capability Programme External Reference Group.
- Kept members informed of our activities through regular emails and our Update reports.
- Responded to consultations on the National Ambitions for Health Research and CfH consultation on the use of patient data.
- Held an Autumn Meeting in Liverpool on cardiovascular disease (CVD) and a Spring Meeting with the new South Yorkshire Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC).
- Held an annual research meeting jointly with NIHR Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) Programme over two days.
- Ran a seminar with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) exploring health spending and health outcomes and invited members to submit to the research bid that resulted.
- Ran two seminars in partnership with the Nuffield Trust bringing senior managers and researchers together.
- Met with key stakeholders such as Sally Davies, Director General, R&D; Janet Messer, National Research Ethics Service; and Alison Frater, NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre.
Chair’s statement

Promoting health services research (HSR) and creating opportunities for knowledge transfer and exchange through events and seminars are the cornerstones of the Health Services Research Network (HSRN) work programme. 2008/09 has been no different with another busy programme with a total of six events held across the country. Events vary from small, high-level seminars, to our showcase two-day annual research meeting. This year we have used different approaches, such as vodcasts and online discussion forums, to reach new audiences. I have been delighted by the positive feedback these events have received and at their success in engaging new audiences.

The other key role of the HSRN is to act as the voice for HSR. We do this through gaining representation on key bodies and groups and by ensuring our voice is heard in policy debates. Much of the policy agenda for the year was shaped by the final report of Professor Lord Darzi’s NHS Next Stage Review. There were a number of initiatives in the Review, in particular those relating to innovation that are of particular interest to the HSR community. The HSRN has worked to both influence and keep members informed of these developments. We lobbied to ensure that the role of HSR in innovation is not overlooked, affirming the message that innovation at a service design and delivery level is just as crucial as at the technology end. As a result, we secured a place on the UK Health Innovation Council (HIC), the body set up by Professor Lord Darzi to act as an overarching guardian for innovation in the NHS. NHS Evidence, the new online portal that aims to provide easy access to a comprehensive evidence base for everyone in health and social care, was another new initiative set out in the Review. We met with Gillian Leng of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and secured HSR representation with a place on the NHS Evidence oversight committee.

Research governance continues to be a key area of concern for our members. In a debate where clinical and industry sponsored research has the loudest voice, the HSRN has had some success in raising the particular concerns of HSR.

We met with Janet Messer of the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) and the director general of R&D, Professor Dame Sally Davies. We also had our views published on the BMJ website. In the coming year we will be producing guidance to help members navigate the new governance and ethics landscape, which has undergone reform in recent years, and will do further work to lobby for a more risk-based approach to these processes.

Issues of patient consent and access to patient data were hotly debated in the year. These issues impact on the work of many health services researchers and responses to the Connecting for Health (CfH) consultation on the uses of patient data will no doubt shape the direction of this debate. We ensured we submitted a response endorsing the principles that:

- access to NHS information for the purposes of research should be permitted when the benefits of the research outweigh the risks of breach of confidentiality for patients
- researchers should take appropriate steps to safeguard patient data
- where patient-informed consent is impractical or prejudicial to patients, access should be granted without the need for consent, providing the safeguards in the second point above are followed.

2008/09 has therefore been another busy year for the HSRN, and my first as its chair. My highlight has been our annual research meeting, which is now jointly held with the NIHR SDO Programme and is firmly established in the calendar as the HSR event of the year. My priorities for the coming year are to continue to seek HSR representation on key national groups and bodies and to lobby for a greater risk-based approach to some of the research governance processes, processes which have improved with the recent reforms, but still fail in many areas. I look forward to the year ahead and to your support in working towards our shared goals.

Professor Bonnie Sibbald
Chair
Overview of the year

Events
The HSRN runs at least three meetings a year: two regional one-day meetings, one in the autumn and one in the spring; and an annual research meeting, all with the aim of showcasing HSR.

Our Autumn Meeting was held in Liverpool with Professor Simon Capewell and colleagues. It drew a mixed audience of researchers, NHS managers and practitioners keen to learn more about the latest HSR on cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Our Spring Meeting was held with Professor Sue Mawson and colleagues at the South Yorkshire Collaboration for Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) and showcased the fascinating work the CLAHRC is undertaking.

The annual research meeting is our showcase event of the year. We have joined forces with the National Institute for Health Research Service Delivery and Organisation (NIHR SDO) Programme and extended this event to two days. As the only event that provides the opportunity for all the different fields of HSR to come together to network and share experiences, it proved a great success with over 250 delegates. Prizes were awarded for the best poster display and research presentation.

We have also been running a series of seminars in partnership with the Nuffield Trust. These aim to bring senior managers and researchers together to hear about and discuss some of the latest research and experiences in service innovations aimed at reducing hospital utilisation and avoidable ill health. Topics included integrated care and case management.

In September we held a joint seminar with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) exploring the link between health outcomes and expenditure. Members were invited to respond to ACCA’s research call that stemmed from the seminar.

Communications
We work hard to try to keep members informed of our activities and other news of interest to health services researchers. We send out fortnightly email alerts and produce quarterly Update reports which are emailed and sent in hard copy to our members. We also provide members with access to the King’s Fund Current Awareness Service. We welcome material for these communications so if you have an event to promote, a job vacancy or would like to share an interesting article, drop us a line. We do rely on key contacts within member organisations to cascade our communications. We know from feedback that this doesn’t happen as well as we hope and remains an issue for us in building networks and promoting our work.

If you would like to receive our communications, please write to stephan.groombridge@nhsconfed.org

In April we published Making sense of the new innovation landscape, our briefing looking at the new NHS innovation landscape post Darzi. It looked at how all the different organisations and initiatives, such as Health Innovation and Education Clusters and Academic Health Sciences centres, sit alongside or align with already established initiatives such as those that stem from the NIHR.

HSRN and SDO Network are working in partnership with Knowledge Exchange, an online portal for NHS managers, to bridge the gap between managers and researchers. We have done this through providing viewpoint articles promoting the use of research and by helping to create a research resource section. For more information visit www.theknowledgeexchange.com

Our website contains details on all our events and seminars and all our current and past publications, visit www.nhsconfed.org/HSRN

Consultation responses
In the year we responded on behalf of members to the National Ambitions for Health Research, a set of national
objectives developed to encourage the translation of major research breakthroughs into new NHS treatments and services within a decade. We also responded to the CfH consultation on the uses of patient data.

Special interest groups and affiliates
The HSRN is keen to support special interest groups (SIG). More information is available on our SIG website page www.nhsconfed.org/hsrn

HSRN has also created links with a number of affiliate organisations and we will be working to leverage these links in the coming year on our work to address research governance issues.

Representing HSR on national bodies
In addition to the HIC we have continued to have our voice heard through representation on the NIHR Advisory Board, the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) and the CFH Research Capability Programme External Reference Group.

SDO Network
Over the past year we have continued to work closely with our sister network to achieve our shared goal of increasing the use of research in management and practice through co-hosting events and seminars. Established in 2007 to engage NHS managers in service delivery and organisation research, the SDO Network now has 65 members. For more information on its work visit www.nhsconfed.org/SDOnetwork

Scholarship to attend European Health Forum
The European Health Forum Gastein was founded in 1998 as a European health policy conference with the aim of providing a platform for discussion for the various stakeholders in the field of public health and healthcare. Working with the NHS European Office we were delighted to be able to offer a place to a young health services researcher. We plan to do the same again in 2009/10.

The year ahead
A priority for the year is further work to address some of the persisting research governance issues. A briefing helping members navigate the new governance regime will be produced but we will also be bringing interested members together to propose concrete solutions to the specific problems experienced by HSR and lobby for further reform.

Another of the initiatives stemming from Professor Lord Darzi’s Review was a new strategic health authority (SHA) legal duty to promote innovation and responsibility for new regional innovation funds. The stated aims of these new funds are to identify, foster and diffuse innovation in the NHS focusing specifically on innovations in healthcare delivery, health improvement, and patient empowerment and engagement. We aim to work through the Office of the Strategic Health Authorities (OSHA) to help support these aims.

There are also a number of policy developments on the horizon for the coming year which we will carefully monitor. For example,

- new arrangements for the assessment and funding of research are being introduced with the Research Excellence Framework (REF) replacing the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)
- the European Commission is making an assessment of the application of the European Clinical Trials Directive with a view to making legislative proposals in the year
- wording of the NHS Constitution, which makes reference to a patient’s right to be offered the opportunity to participate in research, will be finalised
- the Quality Board will consider the use of a research metric
- the new Office of Life Sciences will be firmly established.
Our programme of regional meetings and seminars will continue.

Our Autumn Meeting is being held on 7 October 2009 with the School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield, exploring the ‘promise and perils of performance indicators’. The date for our 2010 annual research meeting will be in the first week of June and will again be held jointly with the SDO.

The next seminar in our series with the Nuffield Trust is on 10 September 2009, looking at the year of care initiative.

In the coming year we will also be working with LSE Health to produce a series of seminars inviting leading experts from countries across Europe to explore whether there are practical, relevant lessons from Europe that could be learnt in England. More details of our past and future events can be found on our events pages at www.nhsconfed.org/HSRNevents

Members of the Board

Chair and elected HSR member: Professor Bonnie Sibbald
Professor of Health Services Research, Director, National Primary Care R&D Centre, University of Manchester.

Elected HSRN member: Professor Chris Ham
Professor of Health Policy and Management, Health Services Management Centre, University of Birmingham.

Elected HSRN member: Professor Kathy Rowan
Director, Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre.

Elected HSRN member: Professor Charles Wolfe
Head of Health and Social Care Research, Director of R&D, Kings College London, Guys and St Thomas.

Co-opted HSR member: Dr Cathy Pope
Reader in Health Services Research, University of Southampton.

Co-opted HSR member: Professor Rachel Elliott
Professor of Medicines and Health, University of Nottingham.

NHS organisation: Michele Moran
Director of Service Delivery and Chief Nurse, Leeds Partnership NHS Trust.

NHS organisation: Dr Gavin Russell
Medical Director, University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust.

Dr Glenn Wells
Head of Research Programmes, Department of Health.

Dale Webb
Assistant Director, The Health Foundation.

Jennifer Dixon
Director, The Nuffield Trust.

Nigel Edwards
Policy Director, The NHS Confederation.

Two board members’ terms expire in April 2010 – a nomination and election process will begin in the New Year.

Membership

HSRN membership is open to any organisation supporting the objectives of the Network. A broad and stable membership is crucial to our success and gives us the legitimacy to speak for the HSR community. Our membership of over 100 organisations, includes 60 academic research units, 40 NHS trusts, a number of professional bodies and commercial consultancies, it therefore represents a sound platform for going forward into 2009/10. We are always keen to recruit new members and details on member benefits and our fees are available on our website.

Finances

HSRN receives grants from the Nuffield Trust and the Department of Health. Member subscription remains a crucial element of our financing. We would not be able to function without it, so a big thank you to all our members for their continued support.

HSRN governance

To help ensure the HSRN meets its aims, it is overseen by a board structured so that it has representation from the HSR community, research funders and NHS management.
Further information

Members’ views are central to our work and there are a range of involvement opportunities. In addition to taking part in our meetings and events, members are encouraged to:

• propose one-day meetings and seminar topics
• feed their views into the Board through the secretariat
• nominate representatives to the HSRN Board; a nomination and election process will begin in the New Year
• share information through our member emails
• propose special interest groups.

For more information on the HSRN please visit [www.nhsconfed.org/HSRN](http://www.nhsconfed.org/HSRN) or if you want to be involved in any of the activities mentioned above, please contact Stephan Groombridge, Senior Policy and Research Officer, Health Services Research Network, tel: 020 7074 3228 or email stephan.groombridge@nhsconfed.org.