Today’s research – Tomorrow’s care


INTRODUCTION

The National Institute for Social Care and Health Research (NISCHR) is the Welsh Government body that develops, in consultation with partners, policy on research and development to reflect the health and social care priorities of the Welsh Government.

NISCHR’s mission is to support today’s research to inform tomorrow’s care to improve the health and wealth of the people of Wales.

This paper sets out NISCHR’s research strategy for 2011-2015. The strategy will be underpinned by implementation plans for each of its key areas.

NISCHR’s strategy has three main themes: streamlining research, supporting excellence and innovation, and investing in the future.

MISSION

To support today’s health and social care research to inform tomorrow’s care to improve the health and wealth of Wales.

BACKGROUND

NHS & SOCIAL CARE R&D

Through NISCHR the Welsh Government invests in a national infrastructure to support health and social care research. Our mission statement recognizes the close relationship between health and wealth. NISCHR’s primary goal is to support research in health and social care which will contribute both directly and indirectly to wealth generation raising the level of health and wellbeing of the people of Wales and contributing to the economic renewal agenda.

In recent years, the Welsh Government has shown its commitment to health and social care research by significantly increasing the health and social care R&D budget and launching the National Institute for Social Care and Health Research (NISCHR). These funding increases have ensured Welsh membership, through NISCHR, of the UK Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research.
NISCHR builds on the work begun by its predecessor the Wales Office of Research and Development (WORD). Informed by the Cooksey review (2005) and the Science Policy for Wales (2006) WORD set out to create a new R&D infrastructure to support health and social care research in Wales. The aims were both to build capacity and support excellence. Following an open and competitive call for applications, WORD announced funding for a range of Thematic Research Networks, Trials Units, Infrastructure Support Services, and a coordinating centre. The new infrastructure became known as the Clinical Research Collaboration for Wales (CRC Cymru).

In November 2007, the Minister for Health and Social Services, Edwina Hart, agreed to the creation of a new National Institute for Social Care and Health Research (NISCHR) to further improve the research infrastructure and support excellence. The establishment of the Institute was a Welsh Assembly Government One Wales commitment. NISCHR was formally launched in March 2009.

With an established infrastructure in place for health and social care R&D, the emphasis in 2010-11 has shifted towards greater emphasis on supporting excellence and streamlining research. To this end three important initiatives were launched in 2011: the all Wales Academic Health Sciences Collaboration; the Biomedical Research Centre and biomedical research units; and the NISCHR permissions coordinating Process. Further developments in health and social care are planned for 2011-12.

SCIENCE FOR WALES 2011

In 2011 the Chief Scientific Advisor led the development of a new vision for science in Wales (ref). The definition of science proposed by the Science Advisory Council for Wales embraces science, technology, engineering, mathematics and the social, environmental, health and e-sciences. Their vision is for a strong and dynamic science base; essential for the economic welfare and national development of Wales. To realise this vision, it is argued, we need to:

- focus on our real strengths and weaknesses, and work hard to improve the latter;
- strive to make the people of Wales more comfortable with science, and better informed of its potential as well as its limitations;
- educate our children and young people to the standards required in the modern world and to encourage and help them into careers in science;
- strive to increase the quality and reputation of our universities as power-houses of the ideas world, to teach and carry out top class research;
- create an environment in which the business, academic and public sector worlds work ever closer together, encouraging innovation and cooperation, to translate excellent research into good business;
- aim to increase the number and quality of jobs in industry, commerce, education, research, and innovation.

Three initial priority areas are identified to give direction to a science-led economy. Those three areas were selected not only on the basis of academic, clinical and translational strength but also on the fit with business and industry in Wales. The three areas are: life science and health; environment energy and low carbon; advanced engineering and materials.
THE LIFE SCIENCES AND HEALTH GRAND CHALLENGE

The proposed theme for this grand challenge area is: ‘An innovative, evidence-based health and social care system for Wales underpinned by the use of nationwide integrated health and social care data, and on an excellent life sciences and health research foundation.’

Wales has significant assets in a devolved NHS, areas of health research excellence in a number of universities and a strong medical technologies sector. There is also renowned expertise in biological research on plant and animal breeding playing into several sectors, including human nutrition. There is an opportunity to raise our game by building better connections between the assets we already have.

Across the UK research in life sciences and health is funded by the Research Councils (in particular the Medical Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council). Government health departments in each UK nation also fund life sciences and health research with an emphasis on the NHS, translational, clinical and applied research. In Wales that function is fulfilled by the National Institute for Social Care and Health Research (NISCHR).

NISCHR PRIORITY AREAS

NISCHR supports research in health and social care to address Welsh Government priorities. Within health specific research strengths were identified in Wales through the Science Policy for Wales (2006) and the Research Assessment Exercise (2008). Those strengths include: Cancer, Cardio respiratory / diabetes, Genetics / genomics, Infection, inflammation and immunity, Neuroscience/mental health, Optometry and vision science, Primary care, and Public health. Within social care there is a focus on children and young people, adults and older adults.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aims for health and social care R&D in Wales can be summarised as “faster, bigger, better”. These aims will be achieved by streamlining research, supporting excellence and innovation, and investing in the future.

We recognize that in order to deliver it is crucial we work effectively with partners in and beyond Wales in the public sector and in business. Thus an important principle underlying our initiatives is a focus on attracting investment, resources and people into health and social care research in Wales to create multiplier effects. It is through focused strategic interventions that maximize out potential that our mission will be achieved. None of this can be achieved without remembering that our research is first and foremost for the benefit of the people of Wales whose interests are paramount in all we do to support today’s research for tomorrow’s care.

AIMS

1. Streamlining research (faster)
2. Supporting excellence and innovation (bigger)
3. Investing in the future (better)
OBJECTIVES

NISCHR will achieve these aims by delivering on the following objectives to

1. Strengthen collaboration between the NHS, social care, higher education Institutions and industry to make Wales an even better place to efficiently and effectively undertake health and social care research.

2. Put the interests of the people of Wales at the heart of all we do

3. Ensure that health and social care R&D funding transparently follows activity and quality.

4. Promote innovative health and social care research in Wales based on integrated health and social care data, and on an excellent life sciences and health research foundation.

5. Support Welsh health and social care researchers increase their success in winning Research Councils and other competitive research funding.

6. Attract and retain the best researchers in Wales.

7. Enhance the culture of R&D within the NHS and social care so that research is recognised as a core organisational activity.

DELIVERING TODAY’S RESEARCH

STREAMLINING RESEARCH

The overarching priority is to meet the challenge of streamlining research in the NHS as identified in the Academy of Medical Sciences review (AMS 2011). The AMS review found that, “UK health research activities are being seriously undermined by an overly complex regulatory and governance environment”. A number of steps are needed to achieve the objectives.

PUBLIC, PATIENT AND PARTNER INVOLVEMENT

NISCHR will work with public patients and research partners to prioritize research and ensure compatibility of processes and initiatives to avoid needless delays and bureaucracy. We will work with researchers, patients and the NHS to translate research outcomes speedily into patient benefit.

NISCHR PERMISSIONS CO-ORDINATING PROCESS (PCP)

Develop and implement a single point of entry to develop a consistent and standardised streamlined system for researchers receiving NHS R&D permissions across Wales. Introduced in July 2011 for all research being undertaken in NHS Wales, the NISCHR PCP co-ordinates the process of gaining research permissions from NHS organisations across Wales. The process provides a streamlined, co-ordinated and consistent review process for gaining research permission from NHS organisations in Wales.

OPEN INNOVATION
Health and social care providers need to ensure they are receptive to innovation from both the public and private sector, and become or remain open to collaboration with academic and industrial partners, academics, clinicians and social practitioners. We will support activities to increase ease of contact between patients, researchers and other partners so that the amount, quality and diversity of health and social care research undertaken in Wales is optimized. By engendering a culture of open innovation where ideas and knowledge are exchanged and collaboration is maximized - we will promote the rapid translation of research into benefits for patients and the public.

**SPEEDIER PROCUREMENT**

NHS Wales, businesses and universities in Wales should collaborate effectively to enable speedier introduction of new technology into the NHS.

**SMATER USE OF DATA**

Through use of routinely collected, securely anonymised data, and through appropriate permission for contact agreements, Wales can accelerate both feasibility studies and recruitment to well designed studies.

**NHS R&D FUNDING ALLOCATION**

NISCHR will work with the R&D community to enable the best researchers in the best centres to deliver research quickly by ensuring that R&D support funding follows activity in a transparent and accountable way.

**RESEARCH PROFESSIONAL NETWORK**

NISCHR will continue to provide a single national network of research professionals to: liaise with local health and social care teams and visiting clinics to recruit new investigators and collaborators; identify potential research participants through database searches, note-screening and direct liaison with clinicians and voluntary agencies; ensure potential research participants have enough information about studies to make a fully informed decision about whether to take part; ensure research complies with research management and governance, ethical and ICH-GCP requirements; recruit, assess and retain study participants.

**OTHER UNDERPINNING ACTIVITIES**

NISCHR will contribute to policy development and provide funding for research governance and research ethics in Wales and provide and administer excess treatment costs funding.

**SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION**

**THE NISCHR INFRASTRUCTURE**

NISCHR will optimise the infrastructure in Wales to enable NHS and social care researchers to deliver on their potential.

NISCHR will continue to support:
• An advisory board to provide governance, and an operational steering committee for operational management and delivery.

• Registered Research Groups to provide the creative energy for the research infrastructure in particular themed areas reflecting priorities by bringing together the right people to develop and submit research proposals.

• Trials Units that manage, coordinate, analyse and support clinical trials and other well designed studies in health and social care.

• Infrastructure Support Groups in areas such as health informatics, health economics, imaging and Welsh language.

• The NISCHR Academic Health Sciences Collaboration to facilitate collaboration between Welsh Government, Health Boards, NHS Trusts, Universities and Industry to combine clinical research, both basic and translational research, clinical care and education to create world leading improvements in healthcare.

• A clinical research centre to provide a national network of research professionals through regional networks and relevant training for the infrastructure.

• A Biomedical Research Centre and Units to deliver the highest quality translational research.

• Development of capacity and excellence in social care research

These developments will be underpinned by Implementation Plans for relevant areas such as Industry engagement, informatics and bioinformatics and social care.

**JOINED UP WORKING**

NISCHR will work with colleagues across Welsh Government to collaborate effectively on supporting research in the NHS and social care to contribute to the health and wealth of the people of Wales. We will also work with strategic funding partners across the UK and beyond to jointly fund and support initiatives to create multiplier effects for the delivery of health and social care research and its benefits in Wales.

**INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, INNOVATION AND COMMERCIALISATION**

NISCHR will work with the NHS, higher education institutions, social care providers and also businesses and government partners to maximize the potential for generating and exploiting Intellectual property (IP) in services and products, to promote innovation and, where appropriate, commercialization of IP in health and social care

**INVESTING IN THE FUTURE**

**RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

In order to build and retain a critical mass of researchers in Wales, NISCHR will work with partners to make the environment as attractive as possible for researchers to remain in Wales or to move here.
In addition to infrastructure support, NISCHR will provide responsive research funding on an open and competitive basis through the Research Funding Scheme.

A NISCHR Faculty will be developed to create a community of researchers in Wales.

Funding will be available on a competitive basis for clinicians and practitioners to undertake research in high quality research groups and help build the research culture in health and social care.

**DEVELOP NEXT GENERATION OF RESEARCHERS**

The next generation of researchers will be supported through investment in capacity building programmes such as Grant Schemes, Fellowships and PhD Studentships.

The NISCHR Faculty will support junior researchers in their development and senior researchers in the delivery of their research.

**HOW WILL WE KNOW IF IT WORKS?**

NISCHR will develop a range of outcome indicators to assess delivery against our aims and objectives. Such measures will include:

- Study approvals granted within 60 days.
- Numbers of people recruited to clinical trials and other well-designed studies.
- Time to first participant in and last participant out in relevant studies.
- Size and value of the NISCHR Research Portfolio.
- Delivery of a funding support model that is transparent and which follows delivery of high quality research.
- Access to and return on investment in UK programmes.
- Significantly increased grant capture from research councils and other leading funders.
- Percentage of key programmes delivered.

Professor Keith Lloyd, Head of NISCHR, August 2011