

INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL LAY REVIEWERS OF THE SOUTH WEST RESEARCH DESIGN SERVICE'S SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

What is the 'South West Research Design Service'?

The South West Research Design Service ('RDS') is part of the infrastructure of the National Institute for Health Research ('NIHR') which is an organisation that coordinates research in the National Health Service. The South West RDS is one of several regional services around the country making up the national RDS.

The RDS exists to provide help to people preparing research proposals for submission to NIHR funding sources. Essentially, it consists of a team of people based in universities and the NHS across the South West who are able to advise and provide practical support when researchers are developing their grant application.

What is the 'Scientific Committee'?

One of the services provided by the RDS-SW is the option of submitting the proposal to one of its monthly Scientific Committee meetings for a full critical review of the draft application. This is a useful opportunity for researchers to draw on the extensive skills and experience of the Committee's members and gain feedback from them which can be used to revise and improve the application. The Committee replicates as far as possible the way a real funding committee works and can help to readily identify gaps – or indeed critical errors - in a research team's explanations and study methods.

Patient and public involvement in the design of research studies is a vital part of ensuring that the research focuses on questions that are important to clinical care **and** will benefit patients the most. An area of the Scientific Committee that until recently was not adequately addressed was a lay perspective. We have been delighted to extend membership of the Committee to include lay members who can provide a 'reality check' on the proposal from a lay point of view. We would now like to increase lay involvement in the Committee by creating a database of people who are willing to provide written reviews in addition to the feedback provided by the attending reviewers. Members of the 'reviewer database' will receive a study proposal to read in detail and will be asked to provide written comments which will be presented on their behalf at the Committee by the attending lay members. Attending members are expected to read all of the proposals being discussed at each meeting, co-ordinate written comments from the other lay members and, from time to time, provide their own reviews. There will be two lay reviewers for each project; this will be a mixture of reviewers from the reviewer database and attending reviewers.

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

What kind of person would make a good lay reviewer for the Scientific Committee?

You would have a very real interest in protecting the interests of individuals but also in supporting healthcare research. You would be able to take a balanced view of the likely harms and benefits of a research project from a lay point of view, ie. someone who can say "this is all very well, but what about the patient?". You will need to be confident about expressing and supporting your own opinions and have the ability to understand the sometimes complex issues involved in reaching ethical decisions. You will require no specific qualifications for this role, but you will need flexibility, excellent communication skills and a desire to "make a difference".

What sort of experience should I have?

No particular experience is required. If however you have experience of involvement with community groups, schools' representative bodies, voluntary organisations and charities, business, or industry, then this may be helpful.

What does 'lay person' mean?

For us it means someone who is not professionally qualified in healthcare. It does not mean that other professions are not eligible. You may, perhaps, have previously been a lay member of an NHS Research Ethics Committee.

What would I be expected to do?

You would work with the rest of the lay member team using your skills and personal experience to reach decisions about research proposals. You would be expected to read the proposal which has been sent to

you for you to review and then fill out a project review form. At the meetings, the proposals will be discussed and your views on the projects will be presented. Overall, you will increase the lay perspective to the work of the committee.

Will I be able to continue with my current job?

Yes, you will not need to attend meetings so this work could be done alongside your employment.

How much time is involved?

The Committee usually meets on the third Tuesday of each month. You will not be asked to review a study every month but there is probably an hour or two's work involved in reading the study proposal and then writing your review.

Who else is on the RDS Scientific Committee?

All RDS staff are invited to these meetings, with usually around 20 people being able to attend. These staff are all employees of hospitals or universities across the South West who have specialist expertise in designing research projects. We also have four lay representatives who attend the meetings.

Where will meetings be held?

The Committee currently meets in a venue in Taunton. The meetings are not held in public and reviewers would be very welcome to attend as an observer as part of their induction or training.

What is my legal position?

Any lay member acting responsibly within the role as a reviewer for the committee would be 'indemnified' through a letter of appointment; this is with the proviso that the lay member has not acted in bad faith, willfully defaulted or been grossly negligent.

How long would I serve?

Membership of the lay reviewer database has no end; for attending members it is anticipated that membership would be for no longer than one year (although this could be extended). The term of appointment may be renewed, but not more than two terms of office would be served consecutively. You may wish to consider becoming a member of the committee at a later date, although this is by no means essential.

Will training be provided?

Free training will be provided for all lay reviewers and would be arranged at a time and place convenient to attenders.

Will I be able to claim expenses?

Any travel costs or other agreed expenses - such as childcare - incurred undertaking Scientific Committee duties will be reimbursed.

Who would I be representing?

Reviewers for the Scientific Committee are not there to represent any particular interest group; the team is expected to give as wide a perspective as possible. However, your voice will be one of a small number drawn from the general public and your viewpoint will be important in supporting the interests of the patient. It is hoped that the lay reviewers will bring their own valuable perspective to the Committee's deliberations through a variety of experiences, contacts and networks, and be able to reflect current public views and concerns. You might like to think about the lay reviewer role as the person who consciously considers how any decisions might appear or feel to an outsider or to a patient. This is clearly not the sole prerogative of the lay reviewer because other people within the Scientific Committee will undoubtedly have their own sensitivities and perceptions.

Who can I discuss this with in greater detail?

If you are aware of anyone who might be interested in becoming a lay reviewer of the Scientific Committee as a member of the reviewers' database, or if you are interested in becoming a lay member yourself, please contact the RDS-SW Business Manager, Debbie Marsh, on 01823 344178 or via email at Debbie.Marsh@tst.nhs.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you!