

A day in the life of a research assistant

Emma Sellers

Being a research assistant who works on dementia studies is a very varied role. I'm involved in six different studies, all of which are at various stages from set-up to closure, requires me to use a range of organisational and communication skills.

In the morning I go to a Memory Café in Leeds. They offer fantastic support to people with memory problems and their carers, and often put on entertainment and food.

I speak to people about what Join Dementia Research is and explain that it's a national service that gives people the chance to sign up and register their interest in taking part in dementia research. This means they get notified about dementia research studies they can get involved with. There are lots of different kinds of research activities, from filling in a questionnaire, to visiting a support group, or taking a new form of medication. Join Dementia Research is aimed at people with dementia and their carers, but anyone can register, as they need healthy volunteers too.

After the café I come back to the office and do some administrative work, like checking my emails and inputting the data I've collected during a study visit from the day before. At a study visit, I go to the home of someone with dementia to complete a series of questionnaires for a research study. While I'm in the office, I check on Join Dementia Research to see if there are any potential participants I can contact for The ANGELA Project. This is a questionnaire study, funded by the National Institute for Health Research. It aims to find out people's experiences of support, during and after diagnosis, to gain an overview of their satisfaction with the care they've received. It hopes to improve diagnostic and post-diagnostic support for people with early onset dementia and their families. Either the person with early onset dementia, or their carer, can complete the 30 minute questionnaire.

After lunch I go to a clinical team meeting to present and promote studies that could be beneficial for their service users. I then spend time screening a psychiatrist's caseload (with their permission), to identify eligible service users for a research study. There's a few, so I email the psychiatrist to check it's OK to send a letter to them, informing them about the research and how they can get involved.

I go to a psychiatrist's clinic to recruit for the CAP-MEM Study. This aims to explore the cause and prevalence of memory problems in people with mental health, neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative disorders. It involves a 10 minute questionnaire related to symptoms of an upset autonomic nervous system, and a 20 minute computer-based test of memory and concentration. During the clinic I speak to service users who are interested in hearing about the research study. I let them know what's involved, answer any questions and confirm they want to take part; a process known as informed consent. For those service users who consent to taking part, I support them to complete the questionnaire and memory test.

Before the end of the day I return to the office and record the service users' participation on their electronic notes and file confidential paperwork.

It's inspiring to be a part of a team that works on dementia projects. I love meeting new people and working with them and their families. It's great knowing that through research, I am making a difference to the lives of people with



dementia. It's through research that we can introduce new treatments, improve quality of care, increase early diagnosis and understand the causes of dementia.