

We speak to Liz Walker, from 2gether NHS Foundation Trust to find out what it is like working as a Research Nurse.



My name is Liz Walker and I work as Research Nurse for 2gether Research based at The Fritchie Centre, Charlton Lane Hospital, Cheltenham. The centre is a purpose built research centre with four consulting rooms. We also have a laboratory where we centrifuge our own bloods and a pharmacy to store medications. Generally it's a 37.5 hour week, Monday –Friday. Sometimes we may need to be with a patient later into the evening and on days that we administer an IV infusion, I come in a bit earlier to prepare the room and equipment etc.

There are a team of five here. Each member of staff coordinates 2-3 research studies, depending on complexity but we all work closely with one another. The team is great to work with and supportive and this makes it a great atmosphere to work in.

No two days are the same. One day I may be filing paperwork and entering data (Research is very paperwork heavy!). Another day I may be visiting a patient in Herefordshire or I may be administering an IV infusion. The best part of the job is meeting patients though!

As a research nurse we play a key role as patient advocate, ensuring patients' safety and protection, and that they are well supported throughout the research study. We need a wide range of skills including management and organisational skills, teaching and mentoring, communication and IT.

We are involved in research into Dementia, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities. The research can include questionnaires, assessments, bloods and saliva samples (usually for genetic testing) as well as vital and medical checks i.e. ECG. We also have a study into dementia.

Are there any myths and misconceptions about dementia?

Everyone seems to know someone with dementia these days!

However, people often get confused with dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Dementia is the umbrella term and Alzheimer's Disease is just one type of dementia – there are, in fact, over 100 types of dementia.

The symptoms are not just memory loss. They may include, difficulties with language, or problem solving, and sometimes personality changes.

Dementia not only affects the patient, carers can be affected too with stress and time restrictions

What is young onset dementia and should people be worried about it?

People with dementia whose symptoms started before they were 65 are often described as 'younger people with dementia' or as having young-onset dementia.

Young-onset dementia is caused by broadly similar diseases to dementia in older people ('late-onset dementia'), but there are some important differences. There are a wider range of diseases that cause young-onset dementia and a younger person is much more likely to have a rarer form of dementia.

Young-onset dementia is more likely than late-onset dementia to be hereditary. In around 10% of all people with young-onset dementia the condition seems to have been inherited from a parent.

Do you have a typical patient and what is it like to get involved in research, what happens in a research trial?

Not everyone likes to get involved in research. It can be seen as time consuming. Some people can feel like they are going to be a "guinea pig". However, its really important that people get involved in research. It helps us to find out what treatments are working and which are cost-effective. It also helps to identify what services are likely to be needed in the future and opportunities for new types of treatments.

There is no typical patient. They just need to be open and willing.

Depending on the trial, the level of commitment required will vary. Each study has a protocol, detailing all aspects of the study. Sometimes, the study may involve just a one-off, one-hour visit or a medicines trial could last 2-3 years with fortnightly visits.

We also have a database where you can register your interest for research in dementia, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities. If you sign up, we can then match you up with any studies we have on our portfolio. People can also sign up to the Join Dementia Research campaign and be notified of any national studies that are open.