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A07 - EDI&S Outputs of appointing a Trainee Executive Group in delivering a multi-centre randomized controlled surgical trial: lessons learnt from *The Sunflower Study*

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Background: Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are widely accepted as the 'gold standard' for evaluating the effectiveness of health interventions. Trial recruitment is notoriously difficult, with approximately 57% of publicly funded RCTs not meeting recruitment target sample sizes.

Trainee involvement can be crucial for large scale clinical studies. However, there remains limited knowledge about methods in which trainee collaboration can assist studies in achieving their aims. *The Sunflower Study* is the UK's largest surgical RCT and is unique in piloting the establishment of a *Trainee Executive Group (TEG)*. Here we explore the outputs of the TEG and its impact on the study.

Method: The TEG consists of five trainee representatives of different training grades and research backgrounds, all appointed via national selection. The TEG held regular virtual meetings seeking to understand trainee perspectives on RCTs recruitment, champion and disseminate examples of good recruitment, identify recruitment barriers, optimise *The Sunflower Study's* social media presence and update digital resources via a trainee section on its website. The TEG also established a network of regional representatives with the purpose of connecting neighbouring recruitment sites with one another, disseminating knowledge at a local level, sharing recruitment tips and encouraging local/national competition. All of these strategies aimed to ultimately boost patient recruitment.

Results: The regional representative network assisted with setting up a new recruitment site, who have since remained a top recruiter. The TEGs establishment saw the highest number of trainees attend the study's yearly '*Investigators' Meeting*'. The TEGs engagement with the study's social media led to an increase in follower numbers and consistently maintained high tweet impressions.

The Sunflower Study is affiliated with the NIHR API scheme and has 165 collaborators registered with the scheme - the highest of any UK study. Through this, trainees are able to develop leadership, communication and research skills; as well as gain competencies required for CCT.

Conclusion: The implementation of the TEG illustrates how innovative strategies can be utilised to actively involve trainees in research. Following the establishment of the TEG, new sites participated in the study, the study's social media impact increased and trainee engagement was optimised. The TEG also encouraged trainees' future involvement with research through the API scheme.

In the post-COVID-19 era, collaborative studies have proven their role in providing high impact quality research. Future studies could foster the TEG model, with an appointed trainee leadership team focusing on maximising trainee output, providing benefits not only for the trainees themselves, but also recruitment sites and studies overall.