“Well, we have had a busy couple of months. I am pleased to inform you that we have submitted our ESSENCE bid for a Programme Grant to the National Institute for Health Research on the 3rd April – two days before the deadline 😊. Thanks to all of you who contributed ideas and have been supportive of this bid. All we can do now is to wait till late August for the reviewers’ comments. Fingers crossed!

At the end of February we hit two additional significant milestones. We submitted findings of the two main pieces of research that answer critical questions for this development phase. These were for Activity 1 - findings from interviews with Amalgamation of Marginal Gains practitioners in elite sport and healthcare and Activity 2 - a systematic review of Essential Nursing Care behaviours. Both were submitted to the Journal of Clinical Nursing special Edition ‘Fundamental Care – the last evidence free zone?’

Congratulations to the team on their hard work.”

Best wishes

David Richards
Senior Investigator, ESSENCE, University of Exeter Medical School

Update on Development phase activities

**Activity 1 Qualitative interviews – understanding improved performance from experienced AMG practitioners**

We recruited people who have applied AMG to improve performance from both healthcare and sport to identify a set of AMG principles that can be built into an innovative fundamental nursing care protocol.

Participants described AMG as a method to improve performance in a complex system. Participants believed that addressing as many of the known components of the intended outcome as possible, the risk of poor performance could be reduced. The following quote illustrates the perceptions of one participant:

“When they adopt a programme like this, it’s not like other things you do in the NHS, when you start doing this things get better, patients look better, your outcomes improve and actually that drives about everyone, then people are very engaged.”

We have incorporated our understanding of AMG into a detailed ‘how to’ framework using a theory called ‘Normalisation Process Theory’. This framework or Logic Model will form the basis of our future ‘ESSENCE’ nursing intervention. The model indicates that AMG could be the basis for improving performance when key elements are present, such as an organisational desire for change, a strong leader and monitoring and feedback of performance benefits to sustain improvements.

Our logic model of AMG into a will be the basis of our future ‘ESSENCE’ programme team intervention.

**Next steps**

In the Programme Grant plan, in the first 18 months we will undertake further optimisation and empirical evaluation of an AMG logic model for a nursing intervention by engaging patients and nurses in a series of qualitative studies.
Activity 2 Systematic ‘mixed studies’ literature review of the evidence for nursing behaviours in essential care domains

We have conducted a series of literature searches on nursing behaviours addressing elimination, hygiene, nutrition, and mobility needs of patients. We identified over 20,000 papers in these four areas and included almost 150 papers that tested the outcomes of nursing behaviours.

Our main focus was on studies of experimental trials of nursing behaviour to look for evidence of any nursing behaviours that have positive effects on patient outcomes.

Our quality assessment indicated only a few papers that could be trusted as having low ‘risk of bias’. Overall we found that studies reporting positive effects came from low quality studies. For example, we observed frequent attempts in low quality studies to overestimate the outcomes of studies. Some of the better quality papers provided potentially useful information on practices that could be implemented by nurses, but positive findings were usually offset by results from the same trials or from others that demonstrated no effects in favour of the experimental interventions. Very few studies used outcomes collected directly from patients themselves, such as quality of life, experience or self-reported symptoms. However there were some good quality studies where the findings were not contradictory.

The review demonstrates the paucity of rigorous nursing research findings that can help nurses improve their practice in essential care behaviours. It reinforces our aim to develop a nursing intervention, generate high quality evidence and take strong account of the patient voice in our ESSENCE programme.

Next steps
We will continue to identify and evaluate evidence on the effect of nursing care interventions in the qualitative studies identified in this systematic review.

Activity 3 Stakeholder engagement

We have identified and recruited representatives from Age UK, Care Matters, Devon Carers, HealthWatch, the Patients Association, and the Royal College of Nursing, and an AMG practitioner to our stakeholder group. We have also engaged with well-known international nurse academics and methodologists.

We have recruited three PPI representatives from each of our research sites who have:
- Produced a ‘PPI Personal stories’ document with examples of experiences of nursing care ‘marginal gains’. The document was successful in reaching key stakeholders and has been used to engage nurses. We have attached it to this e-mail newsletter.
- Assisted in identifying and meeting with stakeholders and nurses.
- Attended training in understanding ESSENCE research methodologies.
Next Steps for completion prior to the end of the Development Phase

1. A synthesis of qualitative data collected in our systematic review of the evidence on the effect of nursing care interventions for nutrition, elimination, mobility and hygiene.
2. A systematic review of evidence for the effectiveness of interventions theoretically underpinned by AMG.
3. We are working on a ‘review of reviews’ of communication strategies by nurses to patients.
4. We will continue to undertake PPI and stakeholder activities in preparation for the Programme Grant stage.

We of course welcome any comments or questions at any time.

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