

UHNM Research and Innovation Update:

Five Things Friday

Welcome to our 'Five Things Friday' update!

On the last Friday of every month, we'll share a quick snapshot of what's happening in Research & Innovation (R&I) at University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust (UHNM). These updates are designed to help you better understand the wide range of support our R&I department offers.



1. Home-Grown Research and Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE)

Our experienced team can support you in developing high-quality proposals and securing local, national, or international funding.

We'll support you through every stage of your study, from design to delivery and ensure patients and the public are meaningfully involved through our dedicated PPIE team. We also offer tailored communication support to help your research find the right audiences.

Research and Innovation expanding across UHNM care groups

UHNM is strengthening how Research and Innovation (R&I) is delivered across its care groups, with new leadership roles being introduced to help embed research more consistently into everyday clinical practice.

The move follows the launch of the North Midlands Commercial Research Delivery Centre (CRDC) and supports wider plans to grow research activity across the Trust, helping ensure more patients can benefit from new treatments, trials and improved ways of delivering care.

By bringing research closer to frontline services, UHNM aims to make it easier for staff to get involved in studies, support evidence-based practice, and turn innovation into real improvements in patient care more quickly.

Three Care Group Research Lead posts are now being recruited. These roles will help shape local research priorities, strengthen partnerships with universities and industry, and support teams to build research capacity within their services.

Together, this work will help create a more consistent, visible research culture across UHNM.



2. Research Delivery

Our hands-on research delivery team works directly in clinics and services across UHNM to support study recruitment, ensuring our patients have access to world-leading research opportunities.

UHNM delivers first gene-targeting MND treatment with specialist research support

UHNM has treated its first patient with the gene-targeting therapy Tofersen for a rare form of motor neurone disease (MND), delivered through the North Midlands MND Care & Research Network at Royal Stoke University Hospital.

The patient, Michael Dean, 67, from Tarporley, was identified with a specific genetic form of MND and has started treatment aimed at slowing disease progression and supporting quality of life. The therapy is given via lumbar puncture and targets the underlying genetic cause of the condition.

The trial was supported by Kelly Westwood, UHNM's first dedicated MND research nurse, who plays a key role in identifying eligible patients, coordinating access to clinical trials, and supporting patients and families throughout their research journey. Her role has strengthened UHNM's ability to open up access to emerging treatments and embed research more closely within routine MND care.

While not a cure, clinical evidence suggests Tofersen may slow progression in eligible patients, with access in the UK currently subject to NICE review. UHNM's involvement supports local access to advanced therapies and reduces the need for patients to travel to other specialist centres.



3. The North Midlands Commercial Research Delivery Centre (CRDC)

UHNM is home to a dedicated Commercial Research Delivery Centre (CRDC), working with industry partners to deliver high-quality commercial studies.

This centre strengthens our reputation as a research-active Trust and brings cutting-edge treatments to our patients faster.

For further information please contact our team via research@uhnm.nhs.uk

CRDC's first cross-sector partners meeting sets strong foundations for collaboration

The North Midlands Commercial Research Delivery Centre (CRDC) successfully held its first Cross-Sector Partners Board meeting on 31 March, bringing together partners from across the local research system.

The meeting marked a positive step forward in strengthening collaboration between clinical, community, academic and public health organisations. Partners reviewed current performance, discussed shared priorities and agreed a clear direction for the continued development of research across the region.

There was strong support for improving inclusion in research, with partners committed to widening access so more patients can take part in studies that reflect the needs of local communities. Discussions also focused on identifying and prioritising new commercial research opportunities, helping to align investment with local health challenges and bring innovative treatments closer to patients.

The group also explored ways to expand research delivery in community settings, supporting access closer to home while building workforce capacity and encouraging innovation across the system.



4. Innovation

From concept to implementation, our Innovation Manager helps staff bring ideas to life, supporting evaluation, adoption, and spread of innovations that improve patient care and operational efficiency.

Please contact our team via innovation@uhnm.nhs.uk for further support.

Got an idea? Take it further with UHNM's Virtual Innovation Office

UHNM staff are being encouraged to come forward with ideas that could improve patient care, services or ways of working.

Whether it's a digital tool, AI solution or a practical service improvement, the Virtual Innovation Office gives you a clear route to get started. Run by the Innovation team, the service helps you register your idea and access the right support early on.

Turning an idea into something used in the NHS can be complex, with standards, approvals and regulations to navigate. Getting support at the start can save time and help your idea progress more quickly.

The team will work with you to understand your idea, identify what's needed next and connect you with the right expertise.

If you've got an idea, no matter how early, don't sit on it. Register it with the Virtual Innovation Office and start moving it forward today.

Email innovation@uhnm.nhs.uk to start your journey today.





5. Governance, Research Funding and More

Our expert support teams set-up the study, keep your research safe, compliant, and on track, handling governance, costing, contracts, and everything in between.

Please contact us via research@uhnm.nhs.uk.

New Deputy Director of Research and Innovation Appointed

Dr Francis Gilchrist, Consultant in Paediatric Respiratory Medicine, has been appointed Deputy Director of Research and Innovation at UHNM.

Dr Gilchrist has worked at UHNM for almost 14 years, specialising in paediatric respiratory care, including cystic fibrosis, chronic cough and leading the paediatric TB service. Alongside his clinical role, he has a strong research background, completing his PhD at Keele University and leading a number of major studies, including multi-centre and international trials as Chief Investigator.

In his new role, Dr Gilchrist will support the wider R&I leadership team to strengthen research delivery and help make it easier to get studies up and running. He is particularly keen to improve collaboration between UHNM and Keele University, drawing on his joint academic and clinical experience.

He said: "I'm really excited to take on the role and looks forward to supporting the continued growth of research across UHNM."