

Member profile for QNI Community Nursing Research Forum



Name: Lee Tomlinson

Job title: Head of Research

Employing organisation: Kent Community Health
NHS Foundation Trust

Country of residence: England

How would you describe your current role and research interests?

I lead the research department in a community trust. In collaboration with our clinical teams, we deliver research studies to the people accessing local services. We also support staff to reach their potential in research activities, to progress the research pillar in their clinical work. This can involve facilitating a 'toe dip' into an existing research programme, through to supporting people with funding applications for academic or research awards.

My interests lie in building confidence in and enabling clinical staff to investigate their questions and progress their ideas to build the body of evidence for care.

How did you first get involved in doing clinical research / your own research?

My earliest involvement was supporting the Oncology Research Nurses with the surgical part of a study looking at chemotherapy regimens for oesophageal cancer. It started with a couple of questions about the participants surgery and before long I was on the delegation log and contributing the surgical data for the study. Then came along a study for pre-malignant patients, it was difficult for the Oncology Research Nurses to run this study, so I ran the study on behalf of the Consultant Surgeon. Nowadays we would encourage the nurse to lead the study as Principal Investigator.

What difference has your research training and experience made to your career / clinical practice / academic practice?

My research training and experience has changed the direction of my career, to the point that it is my main focus. I think the reason for this is my appreciation that research is for everyone. There is a misperception that research is for the academic elite and that people need to be advanced in their careers. There are so many different opportunities to get involved and to utilise your own personal experience and expertise to engage in research activity be that inviting a patient to join a study, collecting data or completing your own research or PhD.

What has been your favourite research experience so far?

Interviewing people for my own research study. Realising that after 8 years of working with people with oesophageal cancer and most likely being the health professional they had the most contact with, I still had so much to learn and understand. Asking different questions and giving people time and space to give their perspective is truly enlightening.

How did you develop your research career?

I took the opportunities available. None of them felt comfortable at the time and felt like a real stretch when I was applying for each but they all contributed hugely to my growth as an individual, as a nurse and as a researcher. Opportunities included contributing the surgical data to that first study, then taking the next one on, and running with it myself. I joined the oncology research group and understood more about the studies on offer to our patients, I went to national meetings to hear the results and see how this would affect care we were delivering back in Kent. I applied for the first round of NIHR Clinical Academic Internships and loved it. I nervously presented posters at conferences and was blown away to see people interested in my work. I supported a surgeon with their research idea, finding a local academic to work with and learnt how to work with the R&D team and submit a bid. I then worked with other surgeons across the patch as part of a secondment to the research network.

This pattern has continued in more recent years, applying for the NIHR 70@70 Senior Nurse/Midwife Research Leader Programme and completing an internship and later a secondment into the CNO team for research and latterly for community nursing. The learning has not and is not stopping, which is why I enjoy it so much.

What are your top tips for anyone wanting to become a clinical academic / become more research active?

- **Believe that you can!** There isn't a type of person who engages in research, we all can and there are multiple ways to do so.
- **Network.** Its key and a fabulously supportive network of great people. People involved in research love to have conversations and are a greatly supportive group. Email, pick up the phone to someone. Someone on this page, someone in your trust, someone who's article you have read or seen their post on twitter. Ask them for advice.
- **Talk about your ideas and aspirations and share your work.** Posters are a great way of building confidence to publish and share. You can even write a poster on your idea, it doesn't have to be the final piece.

Where can we access your recent work?

1. Henshall C, Jones L, Armitage C, **Tomlinson L**. Identifying the Top Ten Unanswered Questions in Community Nursing: A James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership in Community Nursing. *Advances in Public Health*. 2022 | Article ID 2213945 | <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/2213945>.
2. Henshall C, Jones L, Armitage C, **Tomlinson L**. Empowering nurses through inclusive leadership to promote research capacity building: A James Lind Alliance priority setting Partnership in Community Nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.15342>
3. **Tomlinson L**, Jones L, Armitage C, Henshall C. Revitalising community nursing research. *Journal of Community Nursing*. 2021 (Vol. 35, Issue 2)

Find out more about the QNI's Community Nursing Research Forum.