What is Research Governance?

* A brief introduction to the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care 2005

Research governance is about the rules and procedures drawn up by the Department of Health to make sure that all NHS, medical and social care organisations (e.g. hospitals, GP surgeries and day centres) involved in research are aware of and take responsibility for all the research going on.

Why do we have research governance?
There is a need for clearly laid-out rules for quality research, which have respect for the patient at the centre.

What happened before research governance?

- Someone (such as a doctor, nurse, service user or carer) had a bright idea
- All the idea needed was some of their time
- They may/may not have sought ethical approval if patients were involved in the research
- They went ahead and did the research possibly without the hospital, practice/day centre knowing about it

What happens now?

- Someone (such as a doctor, nurse, service user or carer) had a bright idea
- All the idea needed was some of their time
- Their research idea must be considered worth investigating (by an independent scientific review)
- They have to seek ethical approval if the research involves NHS patients or staff
- An approved organisation (sponsor) must accept responsibility for the quality of the research
- The host institution must allow the research to take place within it
- The research can go ahead when ethical approval is granted and a sponsor can agree to take responsibility for the research

What is an independent review?
Before the research is allowed to go ahead the proposal (which explains what the research is about and how it will be done) must have been read and approved by a professional researcher who is not involved in the project. They decide if the proposal:

- Is a good one
- Is worth doing
- Has patients involved in the design
- Will tackle the research question in the most appropriate way and in a way that is most likely to answer the research question
- Is looking at all the relevant issues

What is ethical approval?
All research which involves NHS/social care service users and staff requires ethical approval. Research proposals go to a Research Ethics Committee (REC). The Committee is made up of lay people and health professionals who look at the research and decide whether it could possibly cause any harm (emotional and well as physical) to the participant. The ethics committee will only give approval for the research project when:

- Risks to anyone taking part are negligible or minimal
- Everyone agreeing to take part understands what is expected of them
- Everyone understands that they can refuse to take part or leave the study at any time

What is an approved organisation?
In 2000 the Department of Health set strict criteria which NHS organisations, universities and charities have to meet in order to become a sponsor. A sponsor ensures that the research is of high quality and has suitable checks in place to make sure that all the research is known about, understood and carried out properly.

What does research governance mean?
(a) if I'm asked to take part in research?
Hopefully you will feel more confident that any research that you are asked to take part in, is a well-designed and necessary piece of work. The research should be explained to you in a clear, comprehensible way and once the study has finished you should be told about the results.

(b) if I want to do my own research?
If your research does not require funding, then the impact of the governance process will depend on the nature of your research, and who will take part. If your research involves patients from a particular hospital clinic, GP surgery, in hospital or GP premises or social services, then you will still need to work within the research governance framework. If you research involves people from your user group or support group, then you are not currently required to follow the research governance procedure.

Further information
For further information regarding ethical issues, visit the ethics website http://www.nres.nhs.uk/home/

The Research Governance Framework was published by the Department of Health in 2005.