

Guest Editorial

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Health and social care research: a way of pragmatically addressing societal challenges

As a pragmatic philosopher and mental health nursing academic I passionately believe that health and social care research, which that is embedded within the real-life world of the service user, can assist us in addressing the big societal challenges. One such challenge is the challenge a rapidly ageing society poses. The UK population is rapidly ageing and by 2050, the number of people over 65 years old will have potentially doubled to 20 million, of that figure 8 million will be aged 80 or over. There is no doubt an ageing population will have a significant impact upon future health and social care delivery. Health and social care services are already responding to these predicted changes by focusing on providing care, which is more efficient and more effective. In addition, work-force planning initiatives are focusing on producing health and social care practitioners who will be technologically smart and adaptive to new ways of working (Smith 2015).

Research will play a pivotal role in ensuring these proposed changes are fit for purpose. However, due to the real-life context of care delivery different types of research approaches will have to be utilised, moving away from a one-size fits all approach. This pragmatic approach, using theory for utility sake rather than for theory sake, will move research methods away from just answering abstract questions to addressing real-life need, a user-centric focus to research. Using research in this way enables the practitioner to embed different sources of knowledge within their everyday decision-making activities while acknowledging that knowledge is not static, it is constantly interacting with the real world. Being adaptive to this fast-pace of knowing is a feature of expert practice it is also a feature of the innovator. This does not mean traditional methods are not valued; they are valued where they have utility and where they assist the practitioner to understand the real-life meaning and experiences of the service user (Greenop and Smith 2016).

Research as innovation can take many forms; a living lab approach will robustly structure this activity, an approach used at the Centre for Collaborative Innovation in Dementia. This approach, accredited through the European Network of Living labs (ENoLL), provides; “a user-centred, open innovation ecosystem based on a systematic user co-creation approach integrating research and innovation processes in real life communities and settings.” (ENoLL, 2017). The Centre’s participation within a European funded project called Innovate Dementia has systematically developed this living lab approach. This activity involved the Centre working with project partners to explore ways of developing innovative approaches to dementia care across North West Europe. The Centre worked with 5000 people with dementia in Liverpool, the business sector – SMEs and multinational companies, other academics, and commissioners and providers of services including clinical commissioning groups, NHS Trust, and diverse providers of services. Transnationally ‘over 15 innovations were brought to the market’. Furthermore, the Centre

is now widening its reach by working with co-creation groups across health and social care, this work is not always condition specific, it can be international; however, the real-life needs of the user always drive this work.

Pre-qualifying programmes for aspiring health and social care professionals play a critical role in the development of the research-innovators of the future. These programmes such as the programmes at Liverpool John Moores assist the student to work with knowledge in way that is suitable for today's and tomorrow's health and social care challenges. Students who work alongside a research team or an active researcher will accelerate their development especially where a systematic approach is used. Outcomes should include writing a scholarly paper on a chosen the research topic, which is the aim of this journal (Jukkala et al., 2016). Students who participate in this type of activity will grow professionally and personally, other benefits include developing robust teamwork and communication skills. In addition, motivation and enthusiasm levels for research will increase particularly where this activity reflects the real world of practice (Stanford and Shattell, 2010).

References

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