# Report: NIHR SPCR PPIE Funded Activities

The reported PPIE activities informed Francesca Dakin’s DPhil study titled “The Long Recovery: learning from the experiences of primary care workers during the pandemic to improve wellbeing and working conditions”. This project seeks to build the evidence base for improving the health, wellbeing and working conditions of all staff groups working in GP practices. Through a combination of qualitative methods (ethnography, narrative interviews), the project seeks to investigate in-depth the experience of practice staff at two case-study sites (in Greenwich and Oxford) to build a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of those staff during the pandemic, its effects on their personal and professional health and wellbeing. Through a wider scale survey following the initial case-study phase, it also seeks to build consensus around the best approaches for improving conditions for these staff to reduce workforce attrition, improve retention and in doing so improve patient care.

This project is guided by PPIE at two levels: generally at the project-level and locally at the site-level. The NIHR SPCR funding enabled the latter. Practically, this entailed two focus groups (one at each site), with five participants in each, from a range of job roles. These groups aimed to: i) set localised priorities for understanding how the pandemic has impacted practice staff’s health, wellbeing and working conditions; ii) determine the appropriateness and acceptability of the proposed methods, and adapt them accordingly; iii) determine the appropriateness and acceptability of the project’s stated aims, and adapt them accordingly.

## Activity 1: Focus Group at Ferryview Health Centre 28-06-2022

The focus group at Ferryview took place on 28-06-2022 at midday. It lasted one hour and was attended by five pre-agreed participants. The group included: one receptionist, one reception team lead, one clinical assistant, one salaried GP and one GP partner. The discussion provided useful pointers in terms of what is important at the local level for the project to focus on regarding challenges to staff wellbeing and working conditions, and the kinds of interventions that they might be interested in to improve things, should the data support that. For example, there was a focus on the additional strain placed on reception staff by the radical shift in remote access (leading to a much higher call-rate), the need to work more digitally, and the additional burden and responsibility of triaging patients. What came through as a clear priority for the research and the non-clinical staff was a desire to be more included in conversations about the practice and workplace changes. The working environments and sense of community varied significantly between teams depending both on the nature of their work, but also their physical location in the building.

When asked what they would like to happen as a result of the study, non-clinical staff wanted greater inclusion in discussions about changes to the practices working styles going forward, and involvement in practice-wide meetings. Clinical staff wanted to receive regular updates about possible study insights to implement responsive changes quickly.

The chosen methods and overall timeline of work were deemed appropriate. The reception staff particularly emphasised the importance of anonymity in interviews and discussions to facilitate candour, and so this will be reiterated throughout the data collection process. The study aims and research questions are important to the staff there, and no further aims were suggested, but an additional area of interest for them was understanding why the public and media believe that general practice is closed when they are working harder than ever.

When asked what form of dissemination would work best for them, there was consensus that presentations at group meetings would be the best way to feedback regularly and were interested in receiving a newsletter about this project and the wider RBD2 study alongside any publications.

## Activity 2: Focus Group at Donnington Health Centre 29-07-2022

The focus group at Donnington took place on 29-07-2022 in the afternoon. It lasted one hour and fifteen minutes and was attended by five pre-agreed participants with one additional. The group included: one receptionist, one care navigator, two advanced nurse practitioners, one salaried GP and one GP partner. The discussion focused on the topics that the participants wanted to be included in the study’s interview guide. The most dominant themes were the stress and anxiety felt by all staff, the vaccine rollout, the unfairly negative media and political rhetoric and its impact on staff-patient interaction, and the importance of their practice’s teamworking and inter-colleague care in supporting one another through the pandemic and working changes.

When asked what they would like to happen as a result of the study, the clear priority for all staff was improving patient’s understanding of general practice. That included how: primary patient care is shared across different types of clinicians, and what those clinicians are capable of; that the lack of appointments is not because they are lazy or bad at their jobs; that general practice has been, and is, open and providing face-to-face appointments when needed; that people working in general practice are humans and deserve to be treated with respect. Suggestions to get this across included: a national awareness-raising campaign, patient visits, MP visits, and participation in the study’s planned engagement activities at the Pitt-Rivers Museum. These suggestions will all be considered when planning dissemination materials and determining whom to engage with about the study findings and future work.

The chosen methods and overall work timeline were deemed appropriate, and staff were particularly interested in the participant observation aspect of the ethnography. They were excited to have workload support and felt it was the best way to truly understand the work and become a part of the team. Preferences for dissemination were not discussed due to time pressures.