

**EQUITY IN CLINICAL RESEARCH:
INCLUSION OF OLDER PARTICIPANTS**

The Age and Ageing Specialty Group, supported by NIHR Clinical Research Network Coordinating Centre, is eager to ensure that all patients in the NHS, including older people, have the opportunity to participate in relevant high quality research. Older people suffer the greatest burden of ill health in the Western World, yet are consistently under-represented in clinical trials¹. This is true for cancer, cardiovascular disease, and even for diseases which almost exclusively affect older people such as dementia, Parkinson's disease and arthritis. The lack of fit between participants in clinical trials and users of healthcare in the real world raises serious concerns regarding equity of care².

One means of promoting more equitable research is to avoid the use of arbitrary upper age cut-offs. The use of such upper age limits is surprisingly common with 33% of papers published in four leading medical journals using explicit exclusions on the basis of age³. In many instances, researchers simply opt for an upper age limit on a purely arbitrary basis, without giving a scientific justification for why, for example, a 75 year old would be a suitable research participant, but a 76 year old would not.

We are keen to redress the imbalance of older people in clinical research not only in the interests of equity, but because of the need to draw on the results of good quality research to inform best practice in the management of our growing older population. Avoiding arbitrary upper age limits will make trial findings more generalisable, increase the pool of potential participants, and improve recruitment by involving the additional networks, for example the Age and Ageing network.

The Age and Ageing Specialty Group is in the process of drawing up advice to researchers on the practical benefits of avoiding upper age limits

Chairs of Adoption Panels are being encouraged to provide feedback (as above) to researchers and industry partners who submit protocols which have upper age limits which are not explicitly justified.

Reference List

1. McMurdo ME, Witham MD, Gillespie ND. Including older people in clinical research. *BMJ* 2005;**331**:1036-7.
2. Bartlett C, Doyal L, Ebrahim S, Davey P, Bachmann M, Egger M *et al*. The causes and effects of socio-demographic exclusions from clinical trials. *Health Technol.Assess.* 2005;**9**:iii-x, 1.
3. Bugeja G, Kumar A, Banerjee AK. Exclusion of elderly people from clinical research: a descriptive study of published reports. *BMJ* 1997;**315**:1059.