

**Statement on the protection of time for paediatricians to take part in Research Ethics Committees**

**12 July 2016**

Clinical research involving children is essential if we are to increase our understanding of childhood conditions and improve healthcare for children. Yet a 2015 survey<sup>1</sup> of the paediatric workforce by the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health (RCPCH) demonstrated that very few paediatricians have time allocated for research-related activities related to children's health.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics report '*Children and clinical research: ethical issues*'<sup>2</sup> concludes that for research to become part of the 'core business' of the NHS and other health services, it is important that we foster an increasingly positive attitude towards research across the system, and build confidence in the ethical robustness of that research.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the RCPCH are calling for NHS workforce planning bodies to acknowledge the importance of building capacity within the workforce to support more high quality research into child health. As well as asking for appropriate allocation of time for participation in research activities, we believe it is important for Research Ethics Committees to appoint member(s) with paediatric expertise and for their work to be recognised as a valuable contribution to the research agenda. We believe this would help to ensure appropriate consideration of research proposals and provide access to timely advice on how best to involve children and young people throughout the research process.

In 2012, the Chief Medical Officers of the four UK Governments wrote to every employer in the NHS asking them to "*look favourably on requests from doctors for absence to undertake national work of benefit to healthcare systems across the UK*"<sup>3</sup>. We understand that at present there is significant pressure on resources to fulfil the basic and essential needs of the healthcare system. The proposed new contract for junior doctors in the NHS, however, will allow time dedicated to training and education and we urge all employers to look on participation on RECs as an important and valuable professional development activity.

We encourage those responsible for planning the workforce of Trusts and Authorities of the NHS to take steps to allocate time accordingly. This investment of time will benefit not only the individual in their own work, but through cultivating high quality, ethical research it will ultimately contribute to improving healthcare for children and young people in the UK.

**Notes:**

This statement was developed following a meeting between representatives of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health (RCPCH) and NHS Employers on 5 May 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> RCPCH (2015) Participation in child health research: A survey of the paediatric workforce  
[http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/system/files/protected/page/Research%20survey%20report%20FINAL%20\(wingsan\).pdf](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/system/files/protected/page/Research%20survey%20report%20FINAL%20(wingsan).pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2015) Children and clinical research: ethical issues  
<http://nuffieldbioethics.org/wp-content/uploads/Children-and-clinical-research-full-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Letter to NHS employers, 23 January 2012, available at:  
<https://www.aagbi.org/sites/default/files/Letter%20to%20NHS%2023%20January%202012.pdf>