

Problem Solving Procedure for Imperial Patient Experience Research Centre Public Involvement and Engagement in Research Activities

1. Introduction

- a. The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Imperial Patient Experience Research Centre (PERC) team supports members of the public who contribute to public involvement and engagement in research¹ activities for researchers linked to the Imperial Biomedical Research Centre (BRC).
- b. PERC shares public involvement and public engagement opportunities with members of the public which are developed following requests from Imperial College London (Imperial) and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust health researchers for members of the public to be involved in their research. These opportunities can be for any of the stages of the research cycle from development of a research idea to dissemination and implementation of results. The opportunities available are wide-ranging and could include a one-off questionnaire or discussion to a commitment to regular meetings over a number of years.
- c. Whilst the involvement of public contributors in research is usually a positive experience for all concerned, sometimes things can go wrong.
- d. Our aim is to handle these situations on an informal basis, where possible, by talking to those concerned, clarifying issues and reaching a resolution. However, sometimes this is not sufficient and where this is the case, our procedures are set out below.
- e. Payment for time is usually offered for public involvement in research activities in accordance with the [NIHR payment guidance](#) and, if payment is accepted, the true definition of volunteering does not apply. Volunteering is generally considered as altruistic where individuals or groups provide services for no financial gain. However, as there is no contractual or employment implications, public involvement in research is considered to be aligned with volunteering. As public contributors are not employed or considered as staff then Imperial's policies or procedures for employees/staff concerns or complaints will not be applicable.

2. Serious misconduct

- a. If there is an issue of serious misconduct such as allegations of a criminal offence, an assault, theft or a safeguarding issue, it may be appropriate to involve external agencies such as the police. In cases of serious misconduct, a member of the public will be asked to stop their involvement while a formal enquiry by the relevant agency takes place.
- b. The following are examples of serious misconduct in relation to public involvement in research (including but not limited to):

¹ We use the NIHR definitions of public involvement and public engagement - [Briefing notes for researchers - public involvement in NHS, health and social care research | NIHR](#)

- i. Inappropriate sexual behaviour
 - ii. Harassment or bullying
 - iii. Breach of confidentiality
 - iv. Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol
 - v. Falsification of information or documents
- c. If there is an issue of serious misconduct but an external agency is not involved e.g. the police, a formal enquiry shall take place. This will take the form of a meeting to be chaired by a senior member of staff from Imperial. A letter of invitation shall be sent to the member of the public to attend such a meeting where all information regarding the serious misconduct will be considered and the chair's decision will be final.
- d. In the situation where a member of the public has failed to attend a meeting (as described in 2(c)) then a letter shall be written to them by the main PERC point of contact setting out the issue and repeating the request for a meeting. If this letter is not responded to within 30 working days from the date it was posted, involvement in PERC related activities will be discontinued including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists.

3. Public concerns about their treatment

- a. There may be an occasion when a member of the public has concerns about how they have been treated, either by another member of the public, a member of staff, or Imperial. Where this is the case, the following stages shall be followed:
 - i. **First stage:** The concern should be raised verbally with the main PERC point of contact and a resolution sought. If the concern cannot be resolved, then the second stage should be used.
 - ii. **Second stage:** The concern should be reported by the member of the public in writing to their main point of contact at PERC (or the Director of PERC where the main point of contact is involved in the concern) or addressed to:

By email: publicinvolvement@imperial.ac.uk

By post to:

Patient Experience Research Centre (PERC)
Imperial College London
Third floor
School of Public Health Building
White City Campus
90 Wood Lane
London
W12 0BZ

A formal reply should be provided by PERC (or the PERC Director) within 10 working days suggesting how the issue will be resolved. If the concerns cannot be resolved, then the third stage should be used.

- i. **Third stage:** A meeting shall be held with a senior member of Imperial staff who is not connected to the concern raised, an Imperial Biomedical Research Centre

Community Partner (not linked to the concern or the member of the public) and the member of the public. The senior Imperial member of staff and the Community Partner's proposed resolution will be considered final.

4. Concerns about a member of the public's capability or conduct

- a. There may also be occasions when concerns are raised about a member of the public's capability or conduct, for example, this includes (but is not limited to):
 - i. failing to attend meetings without reasonable explanation
 - ii. arriving meetings late or leaving early without reasonable explanation
 - iii. not contributing to discussions
 - iv. contributions indicating that they have misrepresented² (see definition below) their demographic details or their lived experience
 - v. conduct contravening [PERC's Code of Conduct](#)
- b. **First stage:** In situations where a member of the public's capability or conduct is a concern, an informal meeting shall take place with the PERC point of contact, where the concern is raised with the member of the public. The PERC point of contact shall:
 - i. clarify the expectations or requisite criteria for the public involvement in research role/activity in order to enable their continued involvement
 - ii. clarify the requirement to comply with [PERC's Code of Conduct](#) in order to enable their continued involvement
 - iii. put in place agreed actions e.g. a plan for mentoring or training to address the concern (if appropriate)
 - iv. if the concern is not resolved by the agreed actions within 6 weeks, the second stage should be used
 - v. should it be established that the member of the public has misrepresented their demographics or lived experience, then their involvement shall be discontinued immediately including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists
 - vi. in the situation where a member of the public has failed to attend a meeting (as described in 3 (b)), then a letter shall be written to them by the PERC point of contact setting out: the concern; the requirements and criteria for the role/activity; and required actions in order to enable their continued involvement within a specified timeframe. If this letter is not responded to within 30 working days from the date it was posted/emailed, involvement in PERC related activities will be discontinued including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists
 - vii. if the letter is responded to but the concern is not resolved by the actions set out in the letter within 6 weeks of receipt of the letter/email, the second stage should be used.
- c. **Second stage:** A formal meeting shall take place with the PERC point of contact and a senior member of Imperial staff who is not connected to the concern raised, and an Imperial Biomedical Research Centre Community Partner (not linked to the concern or the member of the public) to discuss the concern with the member of the public and, where possible, seek a resolution.

- i. The resolution could include a commitment by the member of the public to immediately adhere to the requirements of [PERC's Code of Conduct](#) and the expectations of the public involvement role, with a review to take place in 4 weeks time by the same senior member of Imperial staff and the same Imperial Biomedical Research Centre Community Partner.
- ii. After the meeting, a letter or email shall be sent to the member of the public to confirm: the discussion; the expected actions; the timeframe in which the actions should take place; and the date for review.
- iii. If, after the date for review, there are still concerns, then PERC has discretion to extend the review period with a view to resolving the concern (if appropriate) or alternatively, involvement in PERC related activities will be discontinued including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists.
- iv. Should it be established that the member of the public has misrepresented their demographics or lived experience, then their involvement shall be discontinued immediately including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists.
- v. In the situation where a member of the public has failed to attend a meeting (as described in 4(c)), then a letter shall be written to them by the PERC point of contact setting out the concern, the requirements and criteria for the role/activity and required actions in order to enable their continued involvement within a specified timeframe. If this letter is not responded to within 30 working days from the date it was posted/emailed, involvement in PERC related activities will be discontinued including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists.
- vi. if the letter is responded to but the concern is not resolved by the actions set out in the letter within 4 weeks of receipt of the letter/email, the senior member of Imperial staff and the same Imperial Biomedical Research Centre Community Partner shall have discretion to discontinue the person's involvement including removal from Imperial public involvement and engagement mailing lists.