

# TECHTALK

## WITH HRC-DDR



## WINTER EDITION

- Welcome to our Winter newsletter. We hope you find the information helpful and informative.
- Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch with the team.



The NIHR HealthTech Research Centre in Devices, Digital and Robotics is a national centre of excellence supporting the safe, effective and efficient translation of new healthcare technologies into routine care for NHS patients and follow-on social care. This is achieved through our coherent, integrated set of research themes led by experts in their fields.

# A MESSAGE FROM TOM...



As I write, we are only two weeks away from the shortest day of the year. The dismal days, however, did nothing to diminish the huge success of the Digital Health Innovations Conference held in the first week of November. Great speakers, great venue,

great organisation, and excellent feedback. All credit goes to Jonathan and Amy, supported by the rest of the team. We were delighted to have the NIHR, other HRCs, and industry so well represented in the audience.

In September, the MHRA launched The National Commission into the Regulation of AI in Healthcare, chaired by our regulatory theme lead, Alastair Denniston. We also have representation on the Health Systems Working Group and watch with interest as it grapples with this challenging and rapidly evolving area.

Last week, I listened with interest to a news item discussing the rising cost of medicines, and implicitly other MedTech, for the NHS, and the critical need to improve healthcare efficiency if we are to afford these essential innovations. Digitisation must be part of the solution, but with over 30 different Electronic Patient Record systems in use across Secondary Care, there is clearly significant work to be done.

December has always been a busy month for us, with support for NIHR i4i PDA and other applications. A respectable fistful has now been submitted, fingers crossed. The team has also been hard at work delivering a challenging first-in-human clinical investigation of a new medical device, with more to follow in the new year.

Our support triage, PPI, and health economics operating procedures continue to mature under the watchful eyes of Olivia and Sian. The quality and efficiency of the support we offer to patients, clinicians, and industry has advanced enormously over the years. University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust has always been an exceptionally supportive host throughout our HTC, MIC, and now HRC days. The newly appointed Director of R&D has embraced this role with real enthusiasm, for which we are extremely grateful.

Season's greetings to all. I for one enjoyed the Coca-Cola Christmas 2025 TV advert. The advert, of course, was entirely AI generated, and yes, if you look very carefully, the number of wheels on the lorries does change between scenes...





# MEET THE TEAM



**Olivia Brookes** -  
HRC-DDR  
Programme  
Manager



**Tom Clutton-Brock**  
HRC-DDR Director



**Deb Milligan**  
Deputy Programme  
Manager



**Sian Dunning** -  
MD-TEC  
Programme  
Manager



**Hannah Rooney** -  
PPIE Manager



**Amy Smith** -  
Portfolio Manager



**Lola Afelumo** -  
Research Fellow



**Kulli Kuningas** -  
Project Manager



**Jeffrey Faint** -  
Project Research  
Officer



**Amrita Cheema** -  
Project Support  
Office



**Jaya Sharma**  
- Project Research  
Officer



**Newton Chagoma**  
- Health Economist



**Charlotte Whitehouse** -  
Project Research  
Officer

# FAREWELL & WELCOME



Lola



Charlotte

We extend our warmest congratulations to both our Clinical Research Fellow, Lola, and our Project Research Officer, Charlotte. They are both due to begin their maternity leave in December and February. They are both valued members of our team, and their dedication and contributions have made a lasting impact. Whilst they will be greatly missed for a short time, we look forward to welcoming them back upon their return with their new bundles of joy in 2026.

We'd like to welcome the newest member of our team, Jaya!

Jaya's role as MD-TEC Project Research Officer is to support companies through the complex regulatory process for regulatory devices by completing human factors usability testing and device functionality testing.

Jaya graduated with a First-Class Hons in BSc Biomedical Science from the University of Sheffield. Before joining MD-TEC, she managed NHS databases for neuroendocrine tumours and hepatobiliary surgery, crunching data and producing reports for key health decisions. She's also led research projects that have been showcased at international conferences.



Jaya



# THE FUTURE OF AI IN HEALTHCARE

News story

## Professor Alastair Denniston: The future regulation of AI in healthcare

Creating a framework that is safe, fast and trusted.



Our regulations theme lead Professor Alastair Denniston has recently taken part in a guest blog with the MHRA outlining the core principles that should be used to guide the regulation of AI in healthcare.

Alastair is a practising Consultant Ophthalmologist; Professor of Regulatory Science and Innovation, University of Birmingham; and Executive Director, Centre of Excellence for Regulatory Science in AI & Digital HealthTech (CERSI-AI). He is also the Chair of the MHRA's new National Commission on the Regulation of AI in Healthcare.


The blog highlights the national conversation surrounding the use of AI within our healthcare system and how a framework of core principles should be used to guide the regulation of AI in healthcare.

To read the full blog click below.



LinkedIn

Stay up-to-date with all of the HRC-DDR team activities, events and opportunities on LinkedIn.

 nihr-hrc-ddr

# EVIDENCE GENERATION FOR DIGITAL HEALTH INNOVATION CONFERENCE – 5<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER



On the 5th November in Birmingham, professionals from across digital healthcare, regulation, and innovation came together to explore one of the sector's most urgent challenges: how to generate robust, reliable evidence for digital health technologies. As highlighted in the NHS 10-year plan, digital innovation is essential to support a modern health service—"from analogue to digital," freeing staff from administrative burden and empowering patients to manage their care via digital technologies.

The conference opened with a welcome from Jonathan Gregory (Digital and Data Co-Theme Lead), setting the scene for a full day examining the complexities of creating and implementing digital innovations from early concept through to post-market surveillance. Andrew Goddard (MHRA) and Tom Lawrence (NICE) outlined the evolving regulatory landscape, including upcoming transitions in guidance and legislation shaping how digital tools are evaluated and approved.

Throughout the sessions, recurring challenges came into focus: the large number of digital products that do not meet regulatory standards, gaps in evidence required for regulatory evaluations & approvals, and the lengthy, often costly route to NHS adoption. Liz Ashall-Payne (ORCHA)

expanded on common evidence gaps that hinder recommendation and uptake, while discussions on health economics led by Richard Lilford (University of Birmingham), and Simon Clarke (University Hospitals Birmingham); providing pragmatic insight into what NHS decision-makers need to confidently adopt new technologies.





## EVIDENCE GENERATION FOR DIGITAL HEALTH INNOVATION CONFERENCE – 5<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER



Debates and discussion flowed not only from presentations but through panel discussions chaired by Avi Mehra (IBM), Jake Brown (NICE), and Tom Micklewright (ORCHA), as well as in informal conversations during breaks. Concerns about clinical liability remain a deterrent for prescribers, though delegates were reassured that forthcoming work from the National Commission on AI is expected to clarify responsibility and reduce barriers to adoption.

A standout session from Hutan Ashrafian (Imperial College London) highlighted the need to move beyond traditional RCTs, arguing for more adaptive and meaningful approaches to generate appropriate digital outcomes. Afternoon speakers Piyush Mahapatra (Open Medical), Tanya Pankhurst (University Hospitals Birmingham), and Kate Cheema (UCL partners) emphasised that successful implementation and scale rely on solid digital design evidence, while Aditya Kale's (University of Birmingham) closing session on post-market surveillance prompted reflection on ongoing obligations once technologies are deployed at scale—described by attendees as one of the day's "hugely thought-provoking" discussions.

As artificial intelligence and digital technology accelerate, and with healthcare budgets under pressure, the risk of inaction is clear. The event embraced the possibilities of digital transformation while ensuring patient safety remains paramount. The conference underscored that collaboration, transparency and continuous sharing of evidence are essential if the NHS is to implement digital innovations both safely and effectively.

And a final **big thank you to our key speakers and chairs!**

- Andrew Goddard - MHRA
- Tom Lawrence - NICE
- Liz-Ashell-Payne - ORCHA
- Avi Mehra - IBM
- Mehul Patel - PROVA Health
- Richard Lilford - University of Birmingham
- Simon Clarke - University Hospitals Birmingham
- Jake Brown - NICE
- Hutan Ashrafian - Imperial College London
- Jonathan Gregory - HRC-DDR, Pivotal Health
- Piyush Mahapatra - Open Medical
- Tanya Pankhurst - University Hospitals Birmingham
- Kate Cheema - UCL Partners
- Tom Micklewright - ORCHA
- Aditya Kale - University of Birmingham

# HEALTHTECH PUBLIC ADVISORY GROUP

This year has been a busy year for patient and public involvement at the HRC-DDR.

We would like to thank our HealthTech Public Advisers for their valuable contributions during 2025. We are looking forward to collaborating in the New Year as we continue to work together to enhance public involvement within our research projects.

## Highlights from 2025...

- The development of a health technology Public Advisory Group (with 11 members).
- An ongoing, diversity conscious recruitment campaign, leading to the involvement of four new Public Advisers.
- The facilitation of PPIE activity for 7 health tech research projects
- The launch of a PPIE staff training programme.
- Winners of best public-facing stall at the 'Research Showcase' event at University Hospitals Birmingham.
- PPIE evaluation approaches, including understanding the demographics of the public contributors we are working with.





# HEALTHTECH PUBLIC ADVISORY GROUP

## 2026 Aims...

- The launch of a 'PPIE Terms of Service' outlining the Centre's support offer to innovators.
- A PPIE training programme for innovators.
- Launch of 'PPIE support sessions' for innovators.
- Development of PPIE resources for innovators.
- Recruitment of additional HealthTech Public Advisers.
- The assignment of Public Advisers to research projects to enable deeper, more embedded involvement work.

May we take this opportunity to wish all our public contributors and PPIE engaged innovators, a well-deserved rest over the festive season and a very Happy New Year!



Please note, we are respecting our female public contributors' preferences not to have their photographs included in external promotion materials/communications, hence they are not featured in this photograph.

# TEAM ACTIVITY

## Annual Innovation Awards 2025

On the 21st of November, the Technology Supply Chain held its 4th annual Innovation Awards dinner at the Eastside Rooms, Birmingham. The Innovation Awards celebrate the fantastic achievements of the Midlands innovation community and provides an excellent opportunity to engage with professionals from across the sector. This year as part of the West Midlands Health Technology Innovation Accelerator (WMHTIA), the team had the pleasure of presenting the Life Sciences Innovator Award. This award honours trailblazers in life sciences whose breakthroughs in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, devices, healthcare delivery, or data use are improving lives. The Life Science Category winner was Earswitch Ltd, with their unique, end-to-end biometric sensor and control technology, which aims to transform healthcare monitoring. iethico, known for their revolutionary approach to medicine supply solutions were also highly commended in this category.

LBN Innovations Ltd, who have worked with HRC-DDR/MD-TEC for over 3 years were also recognised on the night as a nominee within the Female Innovator of the Year category.





# TEAM ACTIVITY

## HRC Network Health Economics training day

Deb and Newton had a fantastic day at the Health Economics Training Day organised by the NIHR HRC Network and held at the Institute of Mental Health, University of Nottingham. Held in November and attended by delegates from nearly all HRCs, the training day aimed to help HRCs better support innovators understand the value proposition of their healthcare technologies. The day included sessions on health technology assessment and economic evaluation, understanding unmet need and value versus burden when examining a commercial opportunity.

We're looking forward to applying the knowledge from the training in our upcoming projects and to taking part in future training opportunities from the HRC Network! More information about the HRC Network activities is available on the [NIHR website](#).

### HRC network cross-HRC collaboration

The team attended the first HRC network working group in Oxford at the beginning of December. The event gave all of the HRCs the opportunity to come together and explore key topics where teams feel they would like to gain additional knowledge and also share their expertise amongst colleagues. Topics of exploration included health economics, statistics, human factors, behavioural science and implementation.

The team are looking forward to attending further HRC networking events in the new year.

### Aspire Conference, Birmingham

Representatives from the HRC participated in an inspiring conference on 11th December, which focussed on fostering race inclusivity through staff data collection, led by HRC Research Inclusion Manager, Freen Mehdi.

The conference, hosted by NIHR Biomedical Research Centre, Birmingham, showcased the outcomes from the Aspire project and featured talks from health research leaders on how they overcame barriers to flourish in their careers. A truly enriching event which inspired discussion about ways the health research community can collectively reduce barriers and make improvements on data collection for racially minoritised staff.

# 2026... WHATS TO COME

## Grant application workshop for SMEs

The NIHR are hosting an online workshop designed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) preparing applications for funding schemes such as the NIHR Invention for Innovation (i4i) and Innovate UK's Biomedical Catalyst. Attend to gain a better understanding of the funding landscape and learn how to effectively pitch your project, maximising your chances of securing an award.

February 10<sup>th</sup> 2026 - 9:00am

To register for the event - [click here](#)



## Work with us - updating our engagement process

In the New Year we will be launching a new process for technology developers to share their collaborative project ideas with us.

If you are an innovator who is developing a new technology for health and social care, make sure you are signed up to our newsletter or follow us on social media to hear more information about the launch of our call for collaborative proposals.


Further details will be shared in January, so watch this space!



# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES




Below we have highlighted some funding opportunities that may be of interest to our collaborators.



Women in Innovation Awards  
2025 to 2026  
Innovate UK

Deadline: 04 Feb 26  
Max. funding: £75,000  
Duration: 12 months


[More details](#)



Transformative Research  
Technologies (25TRT)  
Biotechnology and Biological  
Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

Deadline: 11 Feb 26  
Max. funding: £225,000  
Duration: 18 months


[More details](#)



HTA researcher-led  
National Institute for Health and  
Care Research (NIHR)

Deadline: 07 Jan 26  
Max. funding: Not stated  
Duration: Not stated


[More details](#)



i4i Product Development Award  
National Institute for Health and  
Care Research (NIHR)

**Stage 2 Opening:** 12 Feb 26  
Max. funding: Not stated  
Duration: up to 3 yrs

[More details](#)



Grow Digital Health Midlands - a neighbourhood health innovation event and funding opportunity.

Key Date: Online webinar Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January  
Maximum Funding: £20,000.

[More details](#)