

# TECHTALK

with HRC-DDR

VOLUME. 5  
SPRING 2026



## SPRING EDITION

- Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of TechTalk, with updates about our latest projects, activities and opportunities.
- If you have any questions, contact us by email at: [HealthTechDDR@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:HealthTechDDR@uhb.nhs.uk)

Springing  
forward into  
new projects,  
events and  
technologies!



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...



Spring is finally here, 5°C outside and hailing hard! Astronomically spring is marked by the vernal equinox and does not arrive until the third week of March. Historically, spring is the start of a new year in many cultures, it is now celebrated globally as World Storytelling Day.

A strong indicator of our success to the beginning of this year has been the introduction of a new triage system to prioritise applications for HRC-DDR support. This substantial piece of work, led by Deb, our Deputy Programme Manager, launched with an online webinar at the end of January with over 100 attendees, resulting in 35 detailed applications!

Support for an ever-increasing number of national grant applications continues, with NIHR, Innovate UK, MRC, and EPSRC all represented. Some upcoming applications will be made jointly with one or more HRCs – an encouraging and important trend.

We have also enjoyed working closely with the HRC Network, both as the lead HRC for workforce development and as a co-applicant on several smaller funded projects.

Our focus on usability testing of novel medical devices continues, making full use of the MD-TEC simulation facility and its ever-expanding family of high-fidelity patient mannequins and equipment.

We continue to conduct controlled arterial desaturation studies in healthy volunteers to support the development of new pulse oximeters. These studies are highly complex, involving protocol design, adaptation of anaesthetic machines to deliver moderately hypoxic (nitrogen-rich) gas mixtures, recruitment, and study management. While conducted by anaesthetists, the contribution of the team has been nothing short of remarkable.

With the Easter holidays now all over, I must now recover from the onslaught of my grandchildren! We hope you all had a relaxing Easter weekend and look forward to the warmer months approaching.



## Medical Technology Expo

**Medical Technology UK, Coventry Building Society Arena, 11-12<sup>th</sup> Mar26.**

The HRC-DDR team attended the event organised by Medical Technology UK at the Coventry Building Society Arena on 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> March 2026. The event brought together innovators, researchers and suppliers in the MedTech environment. Key presentations included an overview of new initiatives from the UK Department of Health to streamline the process of MedTech adoption into the NHS, the use of 3D printing in providing prosthetics for NHS patients and advice on moving from design and innovation to scaling up and implementation of manufacturing.

The event provided an opportunity for the HRC-DDR team to engage with a variety of stakeholders and are looking forward to attending again in 2027.

## Bridging Culture, Faith, and Mental Health Research: Improving Engagement with African, Caribbean and Asian Communities

Hannah Rooney (PPIE Manager) and Freen Mehdi (Research Inclusion Manager) participated in a vibrant event co-developed by Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre and partners, to increase appreciation of how culture and religion shape perceptions of mental health and research.

The event highlighted creative and culturally appropriate ways to engage with underrepresented communities including 'In the Cut', a pop-up barbershop spotlighting Black men's mental health and the barber's chair as a healing space for Black men to talk about their experiences.

Through a mix of talks and workshops, Hannah and Freen explored practical ways to enhance community engagement approaches and research design, in synergy with faith concepts, making them relatable and accessible for African, Caribbean and Asian communities. The team's learning will be used to inform inclusive research practice and engagement strategies at HRC-DDR.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Healthcare Conference

**Revolutionising Healthcare Through Intelligent Innovation**  
**Salford Community Stadium, Greater Manchester**

Jaya Sharma and Hannah Rooney participated in The Institute of Government & Public Policy's AI in healthcare conference which brought together system leaders, clinicians, policymakers, researchers, and innovators to explore how AI can be effectively embedded into healthcare pathways. The event shone a spotlight on the crucial balance between harnessing the extraordinary benefits of AI tools in healthcare, and keeping the 'human in the loop', to ensure responsible and safe implementation. Alongside agile governance, public involvement and staff education, it was demonstrated that AI presents a unique opportunity to truly transform and enhance healthcare across the globe.

In addition to efficiencies, Jaya and Hannah learnt about the potential benefits of AI including reducing cognitive load for clinicians, increasing the likelihood of staff accessing accurate information and implementing best practice guidance, and improving patient experience, health outcomes and safety through better and faster communication.

Conference speakers encouraged healthcare professionals to come together to implement a safe, trustworthy and ethical UK approach to AI that is fit for the future, and invited delegates to join them on this journey.



## One NIHR Birmingham Operational Conference brings together regional NIHR teams

On Monday 16 March 2026, operational leads from across Birmingham's National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) infrastructure came together for the first One NIHR Birmingham Operational Conference, co-hosted by the [NIHR Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre \(BRC\)](#) and the [NIHR HealthTech Research Centre \(HRC\) in Devices, Digital and Robotics](#).

The event took place at the Precision Health Technologies Accelerator, at the recently opened Birmingham Health Innovation Campus, and brought together representatives from NIHR-funded centres across the region to strengthen shared working, communication and collaboration.

The conference was led by Deb Milligan and was attended by over 40 attendees representing a breadth of NIHR schemes and services, the day provided space for both strategic discussion and practical problem-solving.



The conference was opened by Professor Lorraine Harper, Chair of the NIHR Infrastructure Directors' Forum and Director of Research Innovation and Health Impact at [Birmingham Health Partners](#), who set out the purpose of the day and provided an overview of the Directors' strategic themes. This was followed by a series of focused updates showcasing ongoing cross-infrastructure work and a structured workshop that aimed at informing future collaborative activity.

Find out more about the outputs and activities that took place in the summary article on the [Birmingham BRC website](#).

# Team on tour

COME AND SAY HELLO!

## NIHR Grant Writing Workshop 16 April

Amy will be attending the PDA grant writing workshop hosted by the NIHR in Nottingham. It is an opportunity for the team to upskill and meet new faces.

For more information regarding the upcoming PDA see details below.

[More Details](#)



## RDF Conference 10-11 May

The team will be attending the RDF conference, the conference is the UK's leading event for health and care research leadership, management, and strategy.

We hope to see some familiar faces and enjoy the two day event.

[More Details](#)



## NHS ConfedExpo26 10-11 June

The NHS Confed Expo is the UK's leading health and care conference, dedicated to driving innovation and improving care for patients and the public.

Come and say hello to Deb and Amy who will be attending the event and joining the HRC Network exhibition stand.

We look forward to seeing you in Manchester.

[More Details](#)

# Working updates

## Call for proposals

Thank you to everyone who have engaged with our new call for collaborative project proposals, which closed on Thursday 12 May. The quality of proposals submitted by technology developers was extremely high, and we are looking forward to kicking-off new projects in May.

We are aiming to announce our next open call opportunity in Summer.



If you have any questions about this process, please get in touch:  
**HRCengagement@uhb.nhs.uk**

## Stay Connected

All of the information regarding our 'call for proposal' process will be regularly updated and released upon our website and LinkedIn.



[View Here](#)

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## NIHR brand refresh

The NIHR are currently refreshing their visual identity. In line with these updates, we will be evolving our appearance to deliver vibrant, engaging communications about the HRC-DDR and MD-TEC. These changes aim to continue improving our commitment to accessibility.

**Watch this space for our new look!**



# Funding opportunities

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

## i4i THRIVE

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

Deadline: 17 April 2026  
Max. funding: £150,000  
Duration: 9 months

## i4i FAST

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

Deadline: 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026  
Max. funding: £50-100K  
Duration: 6-12 months

## i4i PDA

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

Deadline: 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026  
Max. funding: No Limit  
Duration: 24-36 months

# Upcoming Events

## Med-Tech Expo | 3 & 4 June | NEC, Birmingham

The Med-Tech Expo brings together engineers, innovators and manufacturers to connect with technology and innovation. Sessions cover topics including innovation adoption, scaling medtech in the NHS, and UK medical device regulations.

[More Details](#)

## #Red4Research Friday 19th June

On Friday 19 June, people across the UK and around the world in celebrating #Red4Research. The event is about coming together to show appreciation and raise awareness for everyone involved in research, from participants to professionals, volunteers, regulatory bodies, and partners behind the scenes who bring studies to life.

### How to Take Part:

- Wear any item of red clothing.
- Print or make a #Red4Research sign.
- Take a photo and share it on social media with the hashtag #Red4Research.

