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About Armchair Involvement

“The tools are here – it’s up to us to work out how to use them.”

Armchair Research Participant

New technologies have the ability to transform health services and to engage public, patients, staff and carers in new and more effective ways for service improvement.

That’s what the Armchair Involvement project is about.

Why is it called Armchair Involvement?

Because new technology enables public service providers to engage with the public more fully on the individual’s own terms, perhaps quite literally from their own ‘armchair’, or anywhere else they find it convenient to participate from.

What is the history of Armchair Involvement?

It is a project that the NHS Institute set up to look at how to engage with patients, public, staff and carers using new technologies. The original research report which was produced by involve.org.uk in 2007 can be read at www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair. Some of the most helpful findings and principles are summarised on the back of this card.

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Principles

1. Technology alone is not the answer

Armchair Involvement is about participation and engagement first and foremost, the digital tools available are a supplement, not a substitute for face to face and more traditional communication methods.

2. Understand your participants first

Before beginning to choose tools, it is always best to know your participants' preferred ways of engaging, and to involve them in the design process where possible.

3. If you build it, they might not come!

Go to where the people are – if you are going to run an online engagement project, for example a discussion forum, it is always best to see if people are already engaging in existing forums. That way you might not need to build your own.

4. Look beyond healthcare for inspiration

There are lots of inspiring examples of engagement using a mixture of new and old technologies, whether in local government, campaigning or private sector customer services – open your eyes to new ideas that could work for healthcare.

5. Evaluate and share your learning

Armchair Involvement is an emerging field so sharing your own experiences of trialling new technologies is very important. The Armchair site is here to help.

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Why technology is so important

The world is changing, people can now engage with each other through a wide variety of technologies. Information travels faster and is more abundant than ever, and people are becoming more connected through new technology. People's expectations of public services are increasing.

The health service is changing, it is clear that in the next 10 to 15 years the health service will face challenges that further stretch resources, such as the rise in chronic lifestyle-related conditions and the effects of an ageing society.

In order to meet these challenges, the health service needs to work in partnership with service users and the public. In an increasingly tech-aware world, we need to keep on top of the tools that many people use in their day-to-day lives and seek to understand how these technologies might help us in engaging with patients and public.

"We are entering an age where increasingly people are IT literate, access to technology through digital TV, mobile phones, etc. is becoming universal, and Web 2.0 technology empowers people in new ways. People will have the tools. It's giving them the confidence to take control of their health that is the biggest challenge."

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The Armchair Involvement website

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The Armchair Involvement site is there to help you find out about the new technologies available to engage patients, carers, staff and public for service improvement.

Features:

- A place to share your case studies
- Case studies of what other people have been doing
- A guide to some of the tools you might want to use
- Recommendations from the armchair involvement research



share your
project now!

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Remember:

Choice of armchair involvement tool sits within the design of the process and is only one part of the picture, just like any other public engagement process.



"Technology will increase impact only if it is matched with the message and the audience. [...] We have to be careful not to create new barriers to access. We don't have to get every message to everyone, so we can pick the technology for the purpose. Let's really understand how the target audience get their information before we get excited by the widgets."

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How to use this pack

This resource is part of a continued dialogue between the NHS Institute and key stakeholders around the use of technologies for public engagement.

This pack is designed to promote discussion between colleagues or as an inspirational aid for your own work and ideas. There are no rules of how to use the pack! Use them as you wish or play the game below.

How to play a game using the cards...

Step 1.

In a pair/as a group lay out all tools and case study cards face down.

Step 2.

One person begins by choosing a challenge, or creating one of their own.

Step 3.

Pick a card at random and read it out to the group.

Step 4.

Brainstorm for 5 minutes about how you can learn / be inspired by the card.

Step 5.

If you still haven't found an interesting idea, try another card before the next person chooses their challenge.

For more examples of case studies and technologies and to post your own experiences, visit the Armchair Involvement website (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair).

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Challenges

Here is a list of challenges to promote discussion. Pick a challenge and decide how you might resolve it using technology, you may want to use the technology and case studies cards to inspire you.

In some cases you may feel that a mix of technologies and traditional methods are best, or you may think that no technology is suitable – and that is fine!

1. We would like to work with young people on tackling alcohol and drug issues together
2. Outpatients would like to improve their experience of hospital waiting rooms, we need to find ways of working with them
3. We need to gather the views and experiences of people with disabilities on their transport provision
4. We want to understand and improve the experience of inpatients in mental health services, views must remain anonymous and confidential
5. Parent groups would like to work with us on healthy living and childhood obesity, we need to find the best way of engaging with them

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Challenges (continued)

6. Local individuals with diabetes would like to be more involved in managing their own care and lifestyle, how can we help them achieve this?
7. We need to find out if our bus advertising campaign on stop smoking was successful
8. We need to keep the community informed about forthcoming public engagement meetings
9. We need to reach a diverse cross section of the population about the proposals for a community hub
10. LINK members would like a tool to keep in touch and to promote group discussion
11. We would like to listen to Bangladeshi women's views on GPs surgeries in our local area
12. We want to gather the views of bereaved families on the end of life care received by their loved ones in order to improve our services

**Remember you can
bring your own
challenges too!**



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1. Text messages (also called SMS)

Text messages are short, typed messages sent to or from mobile phones, they can also be sent from computers to mobile phones and vice versa.

The most common form of text messaging is sent person to person as an individual message. However text messages can also be used to interact with automated systems for example information request services, polling and voting systems and reminder and advice services.

Benefits

- A wide range of people are **familiar and comfortable** using text messaging
- Texts can be used to provide **routine information** with good **cost effectiveness**
- People take their phones everywhere – information can **reach** them easily

Who might use this?

- Mobile phones cover a wide demographic
- Young people are strong users of mobiles and text messaging
- People on lower incomes often have access to a mobile phone where they might not access the internet
- People with uncertain living arrangements are often more easily contactable via mobile phone rather than postal addresses

Things to consider

- Text messages are very short!
- Mobile phones often have internet capabilities and picture messaging (MMS)
- You can do short surveys and questionnaires via text

Anything else?

- Bluetooth can be used to provide location-specific text messages to target particular groups of people
- Look at Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair) for more info



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2. Digital Interactive TV (DiTV)

DiTV is a system through which images and sound are broadcast and received. In contrast to traditional TV (analogue) the information is compressed which takes up far less space allowing more channels to be broadcast. Via the 'red button' system users can access information and interact with public services through their television set. Currently people can book GP appointments, order repeat prescriptions and access 'real time' information from multiple health providers.

Benefits

- Digital TV enables **people without internet access** to interact with health information from their own living rooms
- Digital TV has the potential to reach **excluded groups**, particularly those on lower incomes or without internet access
- Digital TV penetration is **supported by the Government**, all UK systems will have switched over by 2012

Who might use this?

- People without computers
- People who are less confident internet users, or who do not want to use the internet

Things to consider

- You can access DiTV through the Nintendo Wii
- If using DiTV it is important to increase general awareness of the service
- Television presents some technical challenges – you cannot simply replicate a website on TV

Anything else?

- Kirklees Council have been a pioneer of DiTV.
- For more info look at Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair) and **case study 1**

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3. Internet phone (eg.Skype, Oovoo)

Skype is perhaps the most well known type of internet phone service. These services enable people to make a 'phonecall' using the internet, either from computer to computer, or from computer to phonenumber. The service can also enable you to see the person you are talking to.

Benefits

- More **personal and engaging** than phone or email as you can see and converse with a real person
- The technology is **easy to use** - simple and clearly designed
- The basic service is **free to use** with other potential **cost savings** (e.g. travel and time)
- Helps to **avoid long distance travel** to specialist events

Who might use this?

- People in rural locations
- Housebound people who find it hard to get out unassisted

Things to consider

- Oovoo or Gmail video chat are some alternative services to Skype
- Broadband connection speed needs to be reasonably good to make a higher quality phonecall

Anything else?

- Increasingly, internet phone is also available for use from mobile handsets
- For more information, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair) and see **case study 4**

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4. Online Survey

Online surveys enable information to be gathered and analysed in one convenient place online. There are a number of providers of online surveying tools including Stellarsurvey and Surveymonkey as well as many others. The link to the survey can be posted on a website, forum or social network, or sent directly in an email.

Benefits

- Online surveys **avoid costs** such as postage and printing
- **Time** can be saved through online surveys as they take less time to administer and collect information
- **Quick and convenient** option for many people
- Online surveys are an **environmentally friendly** option

Who might use this?

- Busy people who are hard to reach using more time consuming methods
- People who use email regularly
- People who don't fill in paper surveys

Things to consider

- Consider whether to also use paper surveys to reach those less likely to participate online
- Choose your provider carefully – check the survey company have all the features you need before you sign into an agreement

Anything else?

- Online surveys provide themes and branding options to suit your needs
- For more information, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair) and see **case study 8**

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5. Blog

Blogs are a type of interactive website. They feature short write-ups of information, pictures and videos which readers can then easily leave comments on. A blog can be written by a single person, or by a group of authors who all contribute their own articles to the same page.

Benefits

- **Quick and easy** to set up and maintain compared to a full blown website
- **Good for connecting** across the web with a variety of target groups
- Useful for getting **feedback** on ideas through comments readers can leave on the site
- Can be used by many authors as a group blog, to create a **community** of writers on a single subject

Who might use this?

- Those who are interested in commenting on or contributing to ideas or proposals
- People who already read blogs and forums
- Busy people who want to leave quick feedback

Things to consider

- Consider how you will deal with comment monitoring, and whose responsibility it will be
- There are a number of free blogging platforms available to get you started such as wordpress (www.wordpress.org) and blogger (www.blogger.com), for more features you pay a small subscription

Anything else?

- There are various ways of boosting your readership, it is worth finding out more about technorati, tagging, and other techniques
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6. Wikis

A wiki is a way of publishing information online which enables people to directly contribute to and comment on the editing of that information. Updates on editing of documents can easily be subscribed to using RSS feeds (see www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair for further info.)

Benefits

- They are **collaborative** - work created online is a group effort
- They promote **openness and transparency** – everyone can see how the information is being formulated and edited
- You can create **public or private** wikis

Who might use this?

- Groups who find it hard to meet up face to face because of distance or time commitments
- People who want to contribute their ideas to specific parts of a written document

Things to consider

- Participants may need some training on how to use the wiki
- It is worth laying out some ground rules on participation before you begin
- Wikipedia is a fantastic example of the powerful way in which wikis can be used for collaboration, it is a multilingual encyclopedia project. Content is created and maintained by contributors. (www.wikipedia.org)

Anything else?

- There are different ways of setting up a wiki, you might want to get some help setting one up, or experiment yourself using a service such as wikispaces or pbworks
- If you use Gmail you can access a service called Googledocs which also enables collaborative editing of documents
- For more information, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair)

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7. Social Networking

Social networking is a way of connecting groups of people online through a website. Different types of social networking tools offer different functions and services and tend to appeal to different groups of people. When you join a network you can create your own profile or identity.

Benefits

- Social networking tools make **organising meetings** and **sharing information** very easy
- Lots of people use social networking sites already
- Social networking enables information and links to be **passed on quickly** through **networks** of people

Who might use this?

- Different networks attract different groups, for example Bebo (www.bebo.com) is popular with younger age range, LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) is a professional network

Things to consider

- You can have closed or open networks, Ning (www.ning.com) is a useful tool for creating a social network of your own, for example around a particular project or group
- Privacy settings can be used to release or restrict information depending on your needs
- Some people don't use social networking at all, you should always consider whether other methods need to be used too

Anything else?

- Many networks have advertising on the pages, be aware of this to make an informed decision about whether suitable for your purposes.
- For more information, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair) and see **case studies 7 and 8**

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8. Video on demand

Video on demand is simply video content hosted online, this can be through YouTube, Vimeo, or other services which enable uploading of videos to the web. The 'on demand' part means that the videos can be viewed whenever the viewer would like to see them rather than waiting for a broadcast.

Benefits

- Information can be accessed **when and where you want** it
- Video brings **information to life** more effectively than written information
- Helps remove **literacy barriers**

Who might use this?

- People who don't like to/are not able to read complex written information

Things to consider

- You need a reasonably fast internet connection to view and hear video properly
- Many video hosting services enable users to rate and comment on videos
- It can be worth producing lower quality, more compressed video in order to enable more people to view the content
- It is worth remembering that once videos are uploaded onto the web through video sharing services such as Youtube, it is difficult to control how they are referenced and used.

Anything else?

- You can easily embed video hosted on sites such as YouTube (www.youtube.com) into your own website or blog
- Have a look at www.surreyhealth.org
- For more information, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair)

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9. Ratings and voting

Ratings and voting systems can work in a variety of different ways, some examples you might look at include Ebay's reputation system, Amazon's customer feedback ratings, and Patient Opinion's service ratings.

They generally provide a quick way of providing basic feedback information. Ratings and voting on specific services can also be provided through touchscreen units in community settings.

Benefits

- Online ratings or voting provide an easy way of getting a **snapshot** of people's views or feedback
- **Quick and simple** for participants to pass on information

Who might use this?

- Anyone who already uses websites
- Anyone who has access to a touchscreen unit

Things to consider

- Ratings only provide a snapshot of people's opinions, and are best used in conjunction with other techniques

Anything else?

- Be careful with open votings and rating systems, the first votes tend to influence the following votes if people can see the results before placing their own vote.
- For an example, look at Patient Opinion (www.patientopinion.org.uk)
- You might wish to look into how ratings or votes can be made visible only after each user has submitted their own input.
- For more information, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair)

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10. RSS feeds

An RSS feed is a way of making websites 'come to you'. When you subscribe to an RSS feed on a website, updated content will be delivered straight to you automatically through your 'feed reader'. A feed reader is a way of organising your RSS feeds. There are a number of different kinds of reader, the Armchair site has further information on this. As well as gathering personal RSS feeds, you can set up public pages where others can see your collection of information, for example through netvibes.

Benefits

- Using RSS feeds means you don't have to check websites to **stay updated**
- Helps people deal with **large amounts of information**
- A way of sharing collections of current information on the web publicly to others **without having to update it yourself**

Who might use this?

- Anybody who wants to access information more easily
- Busy people who don't have time to check sites all the time

Things to consider

- You might wish to set up a tutorial for key people you want to use or view the feed

Anything else?

- You can use sites such as netvibes (www.netvibes.com) or Google Reader (www.google.com/reader)
- For more information on feed readers, look at the Armchair Involvement site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair)



The RSS logo

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1. Using Digital TV to Reach People

Kirklees Council have set up a portal which can be accessed through a digital or satellite television package. Residents are able to access council information on their TV screens.

By using digital television, the council were able to reach a section of the population that did not have access to the council website. Around a third of the population of the UK do not have access to the internet, yet many within this group do have access to digital television.

From their televisions residents can request leaflets, respond to short surveys, obtain application forms for schools and housing, and make appointments to visit their GP.

Digital TV can also host community areas which enable users to submit messages, arrange meetings and display documents and photographs. To date, 84 Local Authorities have applied the technology. This system has also been trialed using the Nintendo Wii in conjunction with a series of telehealth and telecare projects.



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2. Touch screens in North East Essex

Touch screen systems are being trialled in hospitals in North East Essex to gather patient feedback. The screens are located in patient waiting areas, and some hand held versions are provided to district nurses.

The feedback systems are useful as they allow people to enter their views directly after their experience whilst it is still fresh in their minds. The system is quick and easy to use and a version suitable for people with learning disabilities was also trialled.

The screens have the potential to gather feedback from a large amount of people and the type of data produced is relatively simple and manageable. In the trial, computer terminals featured ten key questions about NHS services and then specific questions about the service they received.

David Cohen, Assistant Director of Community Services at NHS North East Essex, said: "We piloted the system because gathering the views of patients on the services we are providing is vitally important. The system is simple to operate, using touch-screen technology, and the feedback has been very positive."



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3. Talk2Croydon www.talk2croydon.co.uk

Talk2Croydon is a website run in partnership with Croydon PCT, London Borough of Croydon and Croydon Voluntary Action. The multi-agency partnership identified the need for a single 'hub' for engagement activities in Croydon.

It is hoped that the site will help local people with common concerns to network with each other and to feel more involved and listened to. The site is used as a tool to help people in Croydon influence local decisions, by raising issues and getting involved in current debates.

The site is divided into message boards for people to start their own discussion topics regarding services and ongoing projects or groups. A number of engagement mechanisms are used on the site, from simple polls to more detailed surveys and discussion forums, as well as a shared calendar for events, shared documents, videos and useful links.

Although there are a number of e-democracy products on the market; the group felt a bespoke web product using open source code would better meet their needs. Six community groups were involved in the procurement specification, the development and the testing of the site, and went on to be involved in marketing and promoting the final site. (See www.institute.co.uk/armchair for more info on open source.)



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4. Engaging Carers through Skype

This is a joint initiative between Surrey County Council, Action for Carers and Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. The project aims to engage carers through using Skype, an online telephone service.

A pilot meeting for carers took place in the evening, it was felt that through Skype, carers could participate from their own homes, as the nature of caring for someone means it can be difficult to leave the house to attend traditional face to face meetings.

The structure of the meeting needed to be fairly rigid, a chair had to indicate a person's turn to speak so as not to cause confusion and to avoid everybody talking at the same time. It is envisaged that the group's feedback will be used alongside the responses from traditional meetings and influence the Carers Charter/ Strategy. The group is also looking into setting up a page on Facebook.



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5. Video Blogging on a Pink Campervan

A pink campervan in rural Calderdale was used to invite young people to share their thoughts on Chlamydia services in the area. The van parked near colleges and nightclubs and asked people participate via video blogs.

Young people were encouraged to share what they want to know about the sexually transmitted infection, where they would like to be screened and what would put them off from being screened.

The team were able to collect fifty responses using this method, and it was felt that the data was of a better quality and level of detail than they would have gained from a survey.

The study was also popular with the youngsters who took part, the camper van was eye catching, a safe environment, and participants enjoyed the chance to be videoed.





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6. Alexandra, Kidderminster and Worcestershire Facebook Page

As the Alexandra, Kidderminster and Worcestershire Royal Hospitals moved towards becoming a Foundation Trust, a recruitment drive for members got underway.

Using the social networking site, Facebook (www.facebook.com), as one of the ways it set out to reach and involve new people. The Facebook page features information about the Trust, highlighting opportunities to take part.

Once people have registered as members of the Facebook group, they are kept up to date about opportunities to have their say in the way that the Trust is developed and delivered. Members can receive messages and updates directly to their facebook account as well as invitations to relevant events and meetings.

Photos are featured on the page to give the information more visual appeal and a number of links are featured to other useful resources. There is also the facility for group members to post comments directly onto the page.



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7. NHS North of Tyne on Twitter

The management organisation for North of Tyne now uses Twitter. Twitter is a free service that allows users to provide short updates of 140 characters or less, including direct weblinks to useful information. You don't have to be a user of Twitter in order to read the updates, they are publicly visible to anybody on the web at: www.twitter.com/NHSNorthofTyne.

This service enables staff to post regular brief updates about their activities and lets those who do set up their own Twitter account keep up to date automatically by "following" @NHSnorthoftyne. Those with their own account can also reply to and interact with the twitter stream through public or private 'direct' messages.

Updates include information about opportunities to take part in consultations as well as health information and updates about the trust. Newcastle City Council Twitterfeed is also worth a look - to see how the Twitter information network develops over time: www.twitter.com/newcastlecc.



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8. NHS Surrey – Online Survey

As part of its consultation on its new kidney unit, NHS Surrey encouraged patients and public to express their views on health and health services in an online survey. The survey itself was straightforward and user-friendly and enabled the respondents to submit open-ended and closed ended responses to NHS Surrey's proposals.

The survey was hosted on a dedicated website www.surreyhealth.org/site/ which enabled participation through a number of different methods, showing how an online survey can link with a number of other options and creative ways of displaying information.

The site featured video clips about the consultation, used message boards and featured information about face to face consultation events and a clearly highlighted postal address for written submissions.



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9. Netmums

This independent site is made up of local networks each managed by a local parent. Each network provides a wealth of information on local services, groups, activities and support services. Popular forums within the site encourage and parent to parent support and a wide variety of topics are discussed here.

To supplement the parent to parent support the site also hosts a parent support service funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This service provides advice and guidance to parents on issues varying from children's disabilities, postnatal depression and day to day parenting concerns.

Netmums also works with other charities such as Women's Aid and Home-Start. A similar and popular site with a similar name is mumsnet.



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10. Health talk online www.healthtalkonline.org

This website provides a way of sharing people's experiences of health management and illness through using short videos.

The information is powerful as it comes first hand from those with experience of a variety of different health issues. The information, videos and transcripts are grouped by subject matter relating to types of health concern, illness or condition. People can then watch, listen to and read the stories of other people who have experience of living with a variety of different health related issues.

The website is hosted by the Dipex research group at the University of Oxford who carry out interviews with patients, carers and families about their experiences of health and illness. The website also includes messages from the public to policy makers and health professionals. The sister website www.youthhealthtalk.org provides health information and videos for young people, about young people.



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