

## AFRI-c: Recruitment successes with care homes

AFRI-c was a cluster RCT designed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed for remote delivery. The study aimed to determine whether high-efficiency-particulate-air (HEPA) filtration units can reduce symptomatic respiratory infections including COVID-19 in care homes. Over three consecutive winters, 91 care homes in England were randomised to either receive air filtration units for bedrooms and communal areas (intervention) or to continue with normal infection control measures (control).

The AFRI-c study team worked closely with regional Enabling Research In Care Homes (ENRICH) teams to deliver AFRI-c. There was a research nurse, with a background in mental health, embedded in the central study team who liaised with ENRICH teams and supported the consenting process. Consent was received by members of the ENRICH/RDN teams, the study research nurse/clinical study officer and by trained care home staff. Where residents lacked capacity consent was obtained through a personal consultee (next of kin/close friend), or a nominated consultee if no personal consultee could be identified. The use of care home staff to receive consent was novel and was viewed positively by many care homes, particularly as it offered staff professional development.

Enabling consenting to be completed remotely was a key part of the success of AFRI-c. Local ENRICH and RDN delivery teams were able to support the consent process without the need to visit homes. This was especially valuable as many residents lacked capacity to consent for themselves and most consultees preferred to complete the consent process over the phone, using an e-consent form. Using multiple methods to obtain informed consent (face-to-face consultations, e-consent forms and verbal consent) contributed to a high rate of recruitment within care homes.

The study team worked hard to make the training accessible for busy care home staff. The “Site Initiation Visits” were shortened into a 30-45 min Teams meeting. The study team also created short online training video modules for the care home staff and delivery teams. The videos were clear and easy to follow and facilitated the understanding of the study. The staff completed training modules relevant to their role in the study.

AFRI-c demonstrated that a flexible study design and support from the ENRICH / Research Delivery Network teams (under the guidance of a central experienced research nurse) are important to the successful recruitment of care homes in clinical research. The multiple methods and approaches for

consenting and the provision of clear and regular training enabled us to exceed our target number of participants. We demonstrated that if the right level of support is available, care homes are keen to be involved in research.