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Providing dedicated time in work hours for paramedic well-being: A feasibility study

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – Process evaluation qualitative interviews

Ethics Approval Reference: IRAS ID 354334

Version 2.0, 29/09/2025

Study title - EMS-SHIELD-Process evaluation
Supporting Health, Improving Employee Life and Duty (SHIELD): a cluster randomised controlled feasibility trial of dedicated time at work for improving Emergency Medical Service worker mental health [NIHR 302983].

Researcher Introduction
My name is Sasha Johnston and I am a DPhil student at the University of Oxford and SWASFT Research Paramedic. I would like to thank you for taking part in or for supporting the EMS-SHIELD feasibility trial. I would now like to invite you to take part in a process evaluation qualitative interview study that has been funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) that I am completing as part of my Doctorate qualification.

Introduction

Before you decide whether to take part or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read this participant information sheet carefully.

The study is part of a DPhil research project aimed at exploring the feasibility and acceptability of providing time for employee well-being and reflection in work hours. The data collection may contribute to publications, presentations, and a DPhil thesis. At no time will any personally identifiable data be published. In this research study we will use information from you. We will only use information that we need for the research study. Everyone involved in this study will keep your data safe and secure. We will also follow all privacy rules. At the end of the study we will save some of the data in case we need to check it and for future research. We will make sure no-one can work out who you are from the reports we write. The following information pack tells you more about this.

Background and purpose of the research

Emergency ambulance work carries risk of stress and mental ill health. While support services exist, many staff don't seek help. Our research found that ambulance employees want dedicated time during work hours, aligned with their professional identity, to reflect on work-related experiences and their well-being. This will prompt access to early intervention tailored support, rather than waiting for a crisis point to be reached. We know that well-supported staff provide better patient care.

This study will explore your experiences and perceptions of supporting or participating in a cluster randomised controlled trial which tested whether providing dedicated, structured time during work hours is feasible and acceptable for paramedics and their EMS organisation. Participation is voluntary, and choosing not to take part will not affect your role or access to organisational support services. Findings will inform the development of future research to assess the impact of this approach on employee mental health and well-being.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study as **you are an HCPC-registered paramedic who was a participant in the EMS-SHIELD trial** (in the intervention or practice as usual arm). We would like to explore your experiences and perceptions of participating in the trial. We are also seeking input from **managers who supported the trial's operationalisation and facilitators who led the dedicated reflection sessions**. Your insights will help us understand what worked and what worked less well for you, which will inform improvements for a future larger study of EMS-SHIELD.

The **exclusion criteria** are any persons not directly involved in trial participation or delivery.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, this will not affect your professional role or future opportunities. You can also withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason, by letting the researchers know your decision.

What would taking part involve?

If you are happy to take part in the study, you will be asked to confirm that you have read this participant information sheet and to provide your consent via an electronic signature. You will then complete a short confidential 'expression of interest' questionnaire which includes basic demographic information, confirmation of which station you were based at during the trial, and any dates when you would be unavailable for an interview.

Please note that not everyone who registers an interest in taking part will necessarily be selected. We want to hear from a variety of people to get a well-rounded understanding of how the trial was experienced, so we will use the screening questionnaires to carefully select participants to ensure a mix of backgrounds, locations, and experiences. This includes staff from different age groups, genders, different stations, and different scores from questionnaires collected from the first phase of the study.

You will be notified by your preferred method of contact whether you have been invited for interview or not. If you are not selected, you will be entered into a thank you prize draw for a £40 thank you gift voucher.

If you are invited to participate in an interview, a selection of dates and times will be offered via the doodlepoll platform, informed by your expression of interest preferences. Once a time is agreed, you will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview with lead researcher Sasha Johnston via Microsoft Teams (lasting approximately 45-60 minutes). An in-person or telephone interview can be arranged if preferred. The screening questionnaires will be destroyed within 3 months of all the interviews being completed.

The interview will explore your experiences, perspectives, and any challenges you may have experienced as part of being involved in the EMS-SHIELD trial. The interview will be audio-recorded for thematic analysis using Microsoft-Teams auto transcribe function, backed up by a digital audio recorder. Your responses will remain confidential, and a code number will be used on the recording in place of your name. Participation in the interview is voluntary, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason.

Once all the interviews have been conducted, we will collate the findings and use them to decide whether and how a larger scale trial of EMS-SHIELD should be conducted.

Will I be reimbursed or receive any payment for participating?

A **£40 thank electronic gift voucher** will be offered to participants who are interviewed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your views and opinion about participating or supporting the delivery of the trial will provide vital information to help shape future research to examine better approaches for ambulance employee well-being, potentially benefiting the workforce as a whole.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We do not anticipate any significant disadvantages or risks of taking part. However, reflecting upon employee support at work, work-related experiences, or mental health may cause emotional upset. If emotional distress occurs during your interview, you can pause for a short break. If after the short break there is concern about restarting, you may be offered further support, which could include the provision of resources, signposting to the wellbeing service, to your GP or other support avenue best indicated in the circumstances. If any information is disclosed that indicates that harm may be caused to yourself or others, the researcher conducting the interview will work with you to seek help and report the risk through routine networks, such as the staying well service. Employee assistance psychological support provided by SWASFT will be available throughout the trial for all involved.

What if something goes wrong?

It is very unlikely that you would be harmed by taking part in this type of research study. However, if you wish to complain or you have any concerns about your involvement please contact Sasha at sasha.johnston@psy.ox.ac.uk or Professor Wild at jennifer.wild@psy.ox.ac.uk or the study sponsor; Head of Research and Audit, Dr Sarah Black at sarah.black@swast.nhs.uk, who will do their best to answer any questions.

How will we use information about you?

We will need to use information from you for this research project. This information will include:

- Age range, gender, job role, base station during the trial, length of service, whether you have previously utilised organisational support for your mental health, whether you would use organisational support in the future, and contact details alongside your preferred method of contact.

This information will be used to do the research or to check your records to make sure that the research is being done properly. People who do not need to know who you are will not be able to see your name or contact details. Your data will have a code number instead. SWASFT is the host organisation and sponsor of this research and is responsible for looking after your information. We will share anonymised information related to this research project with the following types of organisations:

- University of Oxford [Academic institution]
- The National Institute for Health and Social Care Research [Funder]

- Health Research Authority
- Association of Ambulance Chief Executives
- College of Paramedics
- NHS England
- Peer-reviewed journals

We will keep all information about you safe and secure by:

- Collecting the minimum amount of data possible to conduct the research.
- Storing any identifiable information from your initial expression of interest questionnaire separately from interview data (such as anonymised scripts).
- Labelling your anonymised interview script with a code number instead of your name.
- Keeping data anonymous (not collecting any identifiable information about you in relation to this aspect of the study).
- Exporting anonymised interview data from Microsoft Teams as a Microsoft-word file via a secure virtual private network restricted access folder on the University of Oxford network.
- Storing and sharing any data via University of Oxford secure OneDrive files and folders sharing mechanisms.

How will we use information about you after the study ends?

Once we have finished the study, we will keep some of the data so we can check the results. We will write our reports in a way that no-one can work out that you took part in the study. Your data will not be shared outside the UK and we will keep your study data for a maximum of 10 years. The study data will then be fully anonymised and securely archived or destroyed.

What are your choices about how your information is used?

- You can stop being part of the study at any time, without giving a reason, but we will keep information about you that we already have.

- You have the right to ask us to remove, change or delete data we hold about you for the purposes of the study. We might not always be able to do this if it means we cannot use your data to do the research. If so, we will tell you why we cannot do this.

Where can you find out more about how your information is used?

You can find out more about how we use your information:

- at www.hra.nhs.uk/patientdataandresearch
- at https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights
- by asking one of the research team.

- by sending an email via the e-mail addresses listed on this participant information sheet.
- by ringing us on 07825 826250.
- by contacting SWASFT's Data Protection Officer via email on Information.Governance@swast.nhs.uk.

If you have any further queries please contact sasha.johnston@psy.ox.ac.uk, or if you would like to raise an issue with the Sponsor of this study, please email sarah.black@swast.nhs.uk.

What else will happen to the data I provide?

Your anonymised research data may be accessed by authorised individuals from the Sponsor and regulatory authorities for monitoring and audit purposes. Interviews will be audio-recorded using Microsoft Teams and a digital audio-recorder, and auto-transcriptions will be checked and any misinterpretations corrected by Sasha Johnston as the lead researcher.

The recording will be labelled with a unique code in place of your name. You will be sent a copy of this anonymised transcription and asked to check that the words reflect your understanding of the interview, you will be welcome to make any edits or additions to ensure the script represents your views. You can make changes up until the point that the data is integrated with other transcripts for thematic analysis.

The recording of your interview will be deleted from Microsoft Teams as soon as it has been transferred to the University of Oxford secure server. This and digital audio recording will be deleted from the server once your interview has been written up and analysed. Any identifying information within the recording will be removed when your interview is written up.

A separate database containing identifiable information for the purpose of contacting participants will be held on University of Oxford secure OneDrive, access will be limited to relevant members of the research team only.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

Yes, all information collected as part of this research project will be kept strictly confidential. And no personally identifiable data will be included in any research findings or publications. Interview data will be given a code number in place of your name. We will collect your name and contact details so that we can arrange the interview.

Who is organising and funding the research study?

This research is organised and funded through Sasha Johnston's Doctoral Research Fellowship with the National Institute for Health and Care Research [NIHR 302983] and the South West Regional Research Delivery Network. The University of Oxford and the NIHR research design service (RDS South West) have supported the development of this research. The University of Oxford provide supervisory and statistical support.

How have patients and the public been involved in this study?

A small, dedicated team of patient and public representatives support this study by reviewing documents and sharing perspectives about the influence of paramedic well-being and attitude on patient care and experience. A reference group of 20 ambulance employees have also supported the development of this research to ensure that lived experience has shaped the chosen approach and study design. SWASFT's Patient Involvement in Research Group have been involved since the beginning, reviewing plans, providing feedback, and ensuring that patient and employee experience and perceptions remain at the heart of this work.

Who has reviewed the research study?

This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the NIHR funding selection committee, the Health Research Authority via the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) and the South Western Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust Research and Development group. This means that the research meets ethical standards for participant safety, data protection, and scientific integrity.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research project will be used to contribute to a greater understanding of the feasibility and acceptability of providing time at work for ambulance employee well-being, and may be published in academic journals, presented at conferences, or used in other academic outputs such as reports or presentations. This information will help us to decide whether this approach should be tested more widely and what are the best methods to do this. Additionally, the findings will be included in the researcher's thesis, which is part of the requirements for a DPhil. You can opt to receive a plain-language summary of the trial results by ticking the relevant box on the consent form or by emailing the study team with your name and preferred email contact address; we will send the lay summary to those who opt in once the feasibility study findings are available.

Further information and contact details

If you have any questions or would like more information about this research **please contact:** Sasha Johnston, Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford, email: sasha.johnston@psy.ox.ac.uk. If you have any concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, please contact: Dr Sarah Black , Head of Research and Audit, SWASFT, email: Sarah.Black@swast.nhs.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for considering being part of this research.