

## How Patient and Public Involvement Helped Shape NHS Shiftworker Sleep Research

### Background

Many NHS staff work nights, early mornings, or changing shifts. This can disturb their sleep and affect their health, family life, safety at work, and overall wellbeing. About one in three shift workers develop shift-work sleep disorder, when their body clock no longer matches their work hours. They may find it hard to sleep at home and feel very tired at work. This increases the risk of illness, accidents, and feeling worse day to day. There is currently no clear, proven treatment.

This research programme aims to help shiftworkers. Scientists, behaviour experts, and NHS staff are working together to design and test a practical way to improve sleep and wellbeing.

We began with a national survey to learn about the experiences of NHS shiftworkers. We also looked at large sets of data to understand why some people are more affected than others. It became clear that support needs to be personalised. Using this information, we created a new intervention. It is now being tested in more than 25 NHS hospitals to see how well it works in real-life settings.

### What we did

We created the NHS Nightshift Workers Group, made up of seven NHS staff who work shifts and have sleep problems themselves. They met often, looked at our materials, and worked closely with the research team to make sure everything was practical and supportive.

- Their help showed us what really matters to shiftworkers.
- They looked at the national survey, helped us understand the results, and advised on what to measure in the study. They checked all documents to make sure they were clear and useful.
- They guided the practical parts too, such as when to run sessions, who should lead them, how to recruit staff, and whether the equipment and materials were suitable.

This was not a one-off meeting. They were involved throughout the project, helping shape every stage.

### What difference did it make?

Patient and public involvement shaped almost every part of the project. By working closely with shiftworkers, the research team gained a clearer picture of what NHS night work is really like. This made the study more relevant and more likely to work in real life. The intervention now reflects what shiftworkers say will genuinely help them.

Study materials are clearer, recruitment plans more realistic, and the outcome measures better match real experiences.

Group members said they felt valued and could see how their ideas improved the programme. Some even used early findings to encourage positive changes in their own workplaces. The group has been acknowledged in early publications from the project. The work is ongoing is expected to finish in 2029.