Health in Groups: A Longitudinal and Cross-National Study

Dear Patients of Craigmillar Medical Group and St. Serf’s Medical Practice,

We (your GP surgery) are inviting you to participate in a research project called ‘Health in Groups: A Longitudinal and Cross-National Study’. We believe it to be of potential importance. However, before you decide whether or not you wish to participate, we need to be sure that you understand why the research is being carried out and what it would involve if you agree to participate. We are therefore providing you with the following information. Read it carefully and be sure to ask any questions you have, and if you want, discuss it with others. We will do our best to explain and to provide any further information you may ask for, now or later. You do not have to make an immediate decision. If you have any questions, please contact us (your GP surgery) or get in touch with the research team directly. Their contact details are on the next page.

1. **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study is based at the School of Psychology at the University of Dundee. It is sponsored by the University of Dundee and NHS Tayside. The study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The researchers are investigating the idea that social groups (such as the family, sports and hobby groups) affect our health and wellbeing. By learning more about how group membership affects health, they believe the results from this study may have the potential to help people live happier, healthier lives. The researchers plan to investigate this across two countries (Scotland and Italy), to see if this effect is different in different cultures. They also plan to investigate how this changes over time, between 2012 and 2014. This is a big and important project.

1. **Why have I been invited?**

We (your GP surgery) are supporting this research, and we have agreed to participate in this study. Most patients from our GP surgery have been invited to participate, except those for whom we felt contact with the study might be harmful.

**3. Do I have to take part?**

No, your participation is completely voluntary and the care you receive from your doctor will not be affected by whether or not you take part.

1. **What will happen if I agree to participate?**

To participate, please send the reply slip attached to the end of this letter to researchers in the FREEPOST envelope provided (no stamp needed).

You will then receive a pack containing a short questionnaire and a consent form. You simply need to complete the questionnaire. The researchers would be grateful if you could also complete the consent form (if you are happy to), to allow them to access some very general information about your health held by your GP (see below).

The questionnaire should only take 20-30 minutes to complete and asks about your interaction with social groups (e.g., family and community groups). The questionnaire also asks some screening questions about mental well-being and general questions about you.

If you sign the consent form in the pack it will allow a member of the research team to access your health data. The data researchers will access are very general: they will examine your records from the 6 months before you took part in the study, and from this they will count your total number of prescriptions for all medicines, and also for painkillers and for mental health medication. They will look at how many appointments you have had, as well as looking at your most recent measures of blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index (a measure of height and weight). A computer program will be used to extract the data, which means that only the data described above will be accessed: none of your other health data will be extracted. Nothing embarrassing/personal will be accessed, and the researchers will not find out about any medical conditions you have. This study does not require you to visit your GP.

You will be re-contacted in two years and asked to complete a very similar questionnaire and give permission for the researchers to have another look at your health data held by your GP. Exactly the same health data will be extracted.

1. **Will my details be kept confidential?**

Yes. The researchers have a strict policy to ensure your data are kept confidential. They do not ask for your name in the questionnaire (instead they have provided you with a unique Participant Code). They adhere strictly to the Data Protection Act 1998.

1. **What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?**

There are very few risks of taking part in this study. It is possible the researchers discover that you might have undiagnosed depression from your answers to the questionnaire. If this happens they would like to inform your doctor, and he/she may discuss this with you.

1. **What will happen if I don’t want to carry on with the study?**

You can decide to withdraw from the study at any time and your data can be removed from the project. To do this, contact the research team directly using the address below.

1. **What will happen after I participate?**

The researchers will collate and analyse the information, looking for links between group membership and health. They will publish their work in scientific journals. They will also publish a summary of their results on their project website (www.healthingroups.org), so you can see for yourself how important your contribution has been.

1. **Whom should I contact for more information?**

Please contact Dr. Juliet Wakefield. *Email*: j.r.h.wakefield@dundee.ac.uk

*Address*: School of Psychology, University of Dundee, Dundee, DD1 4HN.

*Telephone*: 01382 384853 (office hours).

**10. What if I have difficulties completing the questionnaire?**

Please contact Dr. Juliet Wakefield (using the above address), who will be happy to help.

**11. What if there is a problem?**

If you have a complaint about your participation in the study you can ask to speak to a senior member of the research team (Dr. Juliet Wakefield will put you in touch) or you can contact the Complaints Officer for NHS Tayside.

In the event that something goes wrong and you are harmed during the study there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed and this is due to someone’s negligence then you may have grounds for legal action against the University of Dundee or the NHS, but you may have to pay your legal costs. The normal National Health Service complaints mechanisms will still be available to you (if appropriate):

NHS Tayside (St. Serf’s Practice): NHS Lothian (Craigmillar Practice):

Complaints and Claims Manager, NHS Lothian Complaints Team,

Complaints and Advice Team, WaverleyGate,

Level 7, Ninewells Hospital, 2-4 Waterloo Place,

Dundee DD1 9SY. Edinburgh EH1 3EG.

Freephone: 0800 027 5507. Telephone: 0131 536 3370.

Email: nhstaysidecomplaints@thb.scot.nhs.uk Email: complaints.team@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

**12. Who has reviewed the study?**

The East of Scotland Research Ethics Committee REC 1, which has responsibility for scrutinising all proposals for medical research on humans, has examined the proposal and has raised no objections from the point of view of medical ethics.  It is a requirement that your records in this research, together with any relevant records, be made available for scrutiny by monitors from the University of Dundee and NHS Tayside, whose role is to check that research is properly conducted and the interests of those taking part are adequately protected.

**Thank-you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet and for considering taking part in this study. If you are interested in participating, please cut off the reply slip below and return it to the researchers in the FREEPOST envelope provided (no stamp needed).**

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**Yes, I would like to participate in this study.**

**My name (in capitals): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**My date of birth (e.g., 07/04/72): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**My Address (including postcode): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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**Please return this slip in the FREEPOST envelope provided (no stamp needed). Many thanks.**