**R4VaD Guidance for Researchers**

The R4VaD study is different to many stroke studies that you may have worked on. We developed R4VaD because traditional stroke research studies have not addressed the things that are most important to people living with stroke – memory, thinking, mood, relationships etc.

We recognise that some of the questions in R4VaD ask about sensitive issues. You may feel out of your comfort zone asking about aspects of daily life such as continence, thoughts of suicide or sexual activity. However, there is a wealth of research that shows that these are precisely the topics that people living with stroke want to talk about. For this reason, it is recommended in UK and International stroke guidelines that these areas are covered in follow-up reviews, such as the six month review in NHS England and Wales.

Discussing personal or emotional issues can be difficult and even experienced stroke specialists sometimes struggle. It is impossible to give guidance that will work in every situation as every stroke survivor is different. We have found it is useful to warn the participant before you ask about sensitive issues, for example ‘…after a stroke, many people feel depressed and some people feel so bad they think about harming themselves. I am going to ask you some questions about your mood and whether you have had any such thoughts…’

We know from other research projects that asking about suicide and self-harm does not encourage these behaviours, in fact the opposite is true. Participants often appreciate the chance to talk about these things. If a participant shares anything that concerns you, you should speak with the medical lead for the study at your site.

We also know from previous studies that some researchers, especially younger researchers, assume that questions about sexual activity are not relevant to older adults. Again, the opposite is true and changes in sexuality caused by a stroke can be distressing for stroke survivors of any age. A respectful and tactful approach that allows the participant time to answer but also gives opportunity to decline to answer is needed here. You may find it useful to give a warning about the questions before you ask e.g. ‘….stroke can cause lots of physical problems. I am going to ask you about some of the common physical problems that people with stroke experience. We ask the same questions of everyone and these may include questions that you feel are not relevant to you. We will cover some topics that people don’t like talking about for example going to the toilet or sex. It is absolutely fine to not answer any or all of these questions and you don’t need to give a reason.’