**The impact of extended waiting times for treatment and investigation in people Long-term conditions**

**Background**

Waiting lists for hospital treatment have steadily increased since 2016 (2016 was the last time that the 18-week treatment target was met by the NHS). Waiting times have risen at a faster pace from 2020/2021 (Pope 2023). The number of people on a waiting list for hospital treatment rose to a record of 7.2 million in January 2023 (NHS England 2023), this figure is likely to continue to increase over the coming years as services manage backlogs, deal with increased demand and address workforce issues.

Multiple studies have investigated the impact of delays in access to care, and historically the delay between referral and treatment has not been a concern (e.g., Koo et al 2020, Stack et al 2019, Stack et al 2012). However, as waiting times increase, the concern about delay during this period is also increasing (Mathew 2022, Salisbury et al 2023). People with long-term conditions are increasingly likely to face delays when referred for further investigation and treatment and it is vital that the impact of waiting time delay is investigated.

Of particular concern is the increased levels of psychological distress, unmanaged pain, increased long-term disability and the need to access additional health services while waiting for treatment (Mathew 2022). This requires further investigation alongside the way that people cope with and manage their long-term condition while waiting for treatment. There are also concerns that there may be inequalities in the experience of waiting times between different communities, for example, some regions offer greater choice about treatment location, and on an individual level social economic factors may make faster private healthcare an option for the management of some aspects of healthcare (Moscelli et al 2023).

**Aims**

The aim of this PhD is to investigate how people with long-term conditions cope with extended waiting times, and the strategies they use to manage delay while waiting for treatment. The PhD will investigate coping, wellbeing and the impact of extended waiting list delay on other services (NHS, public, charity and private). The PhD student may choose to focus on a sub-set of conditions or referrals in a specialist area.

**Methods**

1. *Local population data analysis to understand local inequalities in waiting time management.* To understand local waiting times, and of public health data for Herefordshire and Worcestershire region in collaboration with the integrated care board. The ISC are keen to identify where inequalities exist, therefore, the analysis will involve a local inequality impact analysis.
2. *Qualitative interviews with people on waiting lists.* Interviews will be focused on coping strategies, concerns related to delay (e.g., worsening prognosis, pain etc) and the way other services are access while waiting.
3. Data from the interviews will be used to construct the content of a questionnaire to be sent to a larger population of people who have been waiting for a year for treatment. The questionnaire is likely to be focused on coping and services accessed while on waiting lists.

**Supervisory Team**

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