Supplementary Table 1. Interview Guide

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| Interview guide questions |
| 1. Firstly, I would like you to think about your experience as a research assistant. What motivated you to be involved in the project? 2. What went well? 3. What challenges or barriers did you face as a research assistant? 4. What affected your confidence when recruiting participants? 5. How could you be better supported to be more involved in quality improvement activities or nurse-led research? 6. How did this experience as a research assistant affect your future participation in research or quality improvement activities? 7. Is there anything else you would like to add? |

Supplementary Table 2. Themes and categories with definitions and supporting quotes

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| **Theme** | **Category** | **Quote** |
| **Making a difference to patients**  Nurses acknowledged research and quality improvement as activities which improve their profession, practice, and patient outcomes. | **Nurses at the bedside motivated to improve care**  Nurses were motivated by a desire to improve bedside care and patient outcomes within their specialty. | *Then you can bring [it] into your, you know, practice, and its better patient care I believe. (P7)*  *I’ve worked in gynae for 11 years so I was really keen on the content and the topic of this project. (P4)*  *I also wanted to get involved because I wanted to be part of something that could potentially benefit our patients, and even benefit … nurses. Like how to provide information to patients… better. (P1)* |
|  | **Hearing what patients had to say was rewarding**  Nurses felt rewarded by interactions with patients during project recruitment, appreciating the opportunity to listen to patients’ stories and give voice to patients’ opinions. | *I quite liked just talking to patients, not doing nursing, you know, your nursing bits and pieces…* and that was quite rewarding. *(P8)*  *It gave me a chance to hear their story... (P3)* |
| **How the role was laid out shaped the experience**  Key aspects of the role, implementation and resources available impacted the nurses’ experiences, with their overall experiences unanimously positive. | **Working closely with the research team**  Nurses felt well supported by the research team, with value placed on project orientation, ongoing communication and the ability to ask questions. | *I felt I was well supported by the research team... I knew them and... we work quite closely, and then we could connect, you know, ask... questions… (P8)*  *[The nurse researcher] ran through how to do the questions... use the iPad and did some practice interviews with patients... that set you up to be able to do it easily on your own. (P6)*  *...the research team had given you a script that you could use to approach patients... pretty much every shift before I started I would read that script before approaching the patients... made it a lot easier. (P1)* |
|  | **Flexibility of the role**  Flexibility was of great importance, impacting the roles accessibility whilst also presenting challenges. | *I think just being flexible. Being able to just tack on an hour or two after a shift or before a shift was a really easy way to get a couple of hours and a couple of interviews done. (P6)*  *I was definitely like a little bit more apprehensive to go to as well because I don’t really know that area really well, so that was a bit of a barrier to recruiting. (P2)*  *…like you had the options for us to like read it or explain it to them or they could do it on the iPads and stuff like that... I think it made it so much easier for many people to do it... (P7)*  *...nurses were going around in their uniform... it was difficult, as in the patient would be like, ‘Oh can you do this for me do that for me?’, and that’s probably the biggest barrier... (P4)* |
|  | **Working within the constraints of the clinical setting**  Nurses identified the clinical environment presented many challenges, including ward activity, clinical procedures and the COVID pandemic. | *I think a lot of it is to do with just, like, lack of time. Like when you’re on the ward and you’re on the floor, you’re so busy and your shift, like, from beginning to the end, like, you’re doing stuff. You don’t have that time to sit down and go through things and do things, like, even other projects that I have at the moment I’m struggling like to find the time during my shifts to get it done. (P6)*  *Other difficulties would have included time limitations, being able to see the patients when I was free and they were in a state to talk to me about it. Time constraints from my point of view from working and from their point of view is having things done to them. They might have been taken to theatre or being discharged. Other time constraints included being in an open area like in the Day Surgery Unit. I think some people may have felt...ah...that it was not confidential enough even though it wasn’t really confidential stuff. Ah... language barriers I think was another thing as well. (P3)*  *… that was probably the biggest barriers* (sic)*, was actually the time and trying to recruit patients, you know, at four o’clock in the afternoon when they kind of don’t really want to be disturbed, after an early shift* (P4). |
| **Growing confidence as researchers**  Nurses reported the experience had a positive impact on their confidence and aspirations as future researchers, whilst describing a desire for more accessible support and education. | **Encouraged to do more**  Nurses expressed aspirations to participate in or lead future projects which consolidated previous knowledge and nurtured interest; however, the majority were unsure how to become involved. | *I would love to do that more. That was a really enjoyable experience, and, or anything, you know, I can do with patient involvement. I would love to do it more. (P8)*  *I guess it was a good experience, because overall for me it was pretty positive... so it would definitely encourage me to, like, do it again if there was another project where they needed people to help collect data. (P6)* |
|  | **Accessible opportunities and support for ward-based nurses**    Nurses detailed dissatisfaction with availability of research opportunities, education and support. They articulated desiring local opportunities to further skills, knowledge and confidence in research and requested dissemination at a ward-level to increase accessibility. | *...at uni we got to learn a lot about, you know, research projects and practice writing them and QI, umm, but it kind of seemed very abstract process*. *(P1)*  *Maybe if there was just a bit more encouragement to do them… maybe an SDN or someone who could really be like, ‘Ok, like if anyone wants to pick a topic I am so happy to support you’. (P2)*  *I just want to become a bit more familiar with the whole cycle, and the whole process. (P6)*  *Online learning package? That’d be nice. (P8)* |