The Challenge:
HealthWise Wales is a confidential research study, which aims to develop an in-depth knowledge on the health of the nation. The information gained will be used to help the NHS plan for the future, including support for health needs and evaluation of services and policies.

The study intends to raise public awareness of health and social care research, and offer a way for the public to be actively involved in and contribute to research.

The Research:
Members of the public register and are then asked questions about their health and wellbeing on the study website. On average, it takes people around 10-15 minutes to complete all of the questionnaires in one sitting.

The study then contacts participants every 6 months, to ask questions about lifestyle, health and wellbeing – so that the researchers can see how participant’s lifestyles and health might be changing.

Members of the public who sign up to the study will also have the opportunity to take part in specific health and social care research projects that maybe relevant to them. This may include being contacted because of a specific condition (heart disease, meningitis, diabetes, cancer, etc.).

The study, which is being carried out by researchers at the Farr Institute CIPHER, aims to recruit 260,000 people, aged 16 and older, in Wales over a five-year period.

HealthWise Wales is helping to address the problem faced by many researchers who find it difficult to recruit people to take part in their studies.

The Results:
Funded by the Welsh Government, the study has been approved by the Welsh Research Ethics Committee and is compliant with the Data Protection Act to ensure data remains private and confidential.

The study uses participants details (name, address, postcode and date of birth) to access their NHS number and information in their health records that are held by their doctor or by the NHS. This information can then be used, together with the information given through the website, to answer questions such as “Why are some people in Wales healthier than others even though they live in the same area?” or “Why are people admitted to hospital in Wales and what can we do so less people are admitted?”

When the information from the questionnaires is linked with NHS data, all details that could be used to identify a participant are removed. For more details on how this works visit www.healthwisewales.gov.wales

Participant data will only be used to support the research objectives of the project. The study undertakes rigorous security controls which are always under review to ensure that identifiable information is not accessed for any other purpose.

The Impact:
Prof Shantini Paranjothy, from the Farr Institute CIPHER, said the project is built on “a strong tradition of population health research in Wales. This large-scale project will use modern technology to engage people in research and provide opportunities to contribute to the design and conduct of research studies.”

The aim is to build an in-depth picture of the health of the nation, using the data to plan NHS services in future. The participants in the study will be helping to answer the big questions that will improve health and social services, lead to better treatments, and increase health and wellbeing for the people of Wales.

For more information visit: www.healthwisewales.gov.wales

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