

Clinical Trial Recruitment: A Partnership Success Story

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Aims

- The NRS Primary Care Network (NRSPCN) partnered with the Edinburgh Clinical Trials Unit to facilitate recruitment for a large cardiovascular clinical trial (SCOT-HEART2).
- The SCOT-HEART 2 study aims to compare two ways of preventing heart attacks and has a recruitment target of 6000 participants¹.
- The aim of the partnership is to provide a robust recruitment stream to enable the study to reach the recruitment target.

Methods

- The NRSPCN advertised the study in regular newsletters that are distributed to all GP practices within defined health boards.
- When a practice agrees to take part, the network search their patient list to identify people who meet the entry criteria for the study.
- An invitation letter and study information are then sent out to potential participants from that GP practice.

Results

This partnership has proved to be highly effective for clinical trial recruitment.

- **53 practices** have taken part in this research study since November 2019.
- **25,203 invitation letters** have been posted out to potential participants.
- 3875 people have enrolled on the study following receipt of the study information from their GP practice, making up **71.6% of recruited participants**.
- 26.3% of participants are recruited via self-referral. Some of these will include friends and family of those who received an invitation letter.

Recruitment through invitation via the NRSPCN was initially planned for Lothian only. However, it was extended to other health boards, with the first mail-outs being completed in January 2024 in Fife, May 2024 in Forth Valley and January 2025 in the Borders.

Health board	Number of practices	Average response rate	Range of response rate
Lothian	41	20%	4-54%
Fife	3	6%	2-12%
Forth Valley	7	15%	8-26%
Borders	2	19%	N/A

NOTE: RESPONSE RATE WILL INCLUDE OTHER RECRUITMENT STREAMS

The maximum response rate has been 54%.

9 practices have taken part in repeat mail-outs.

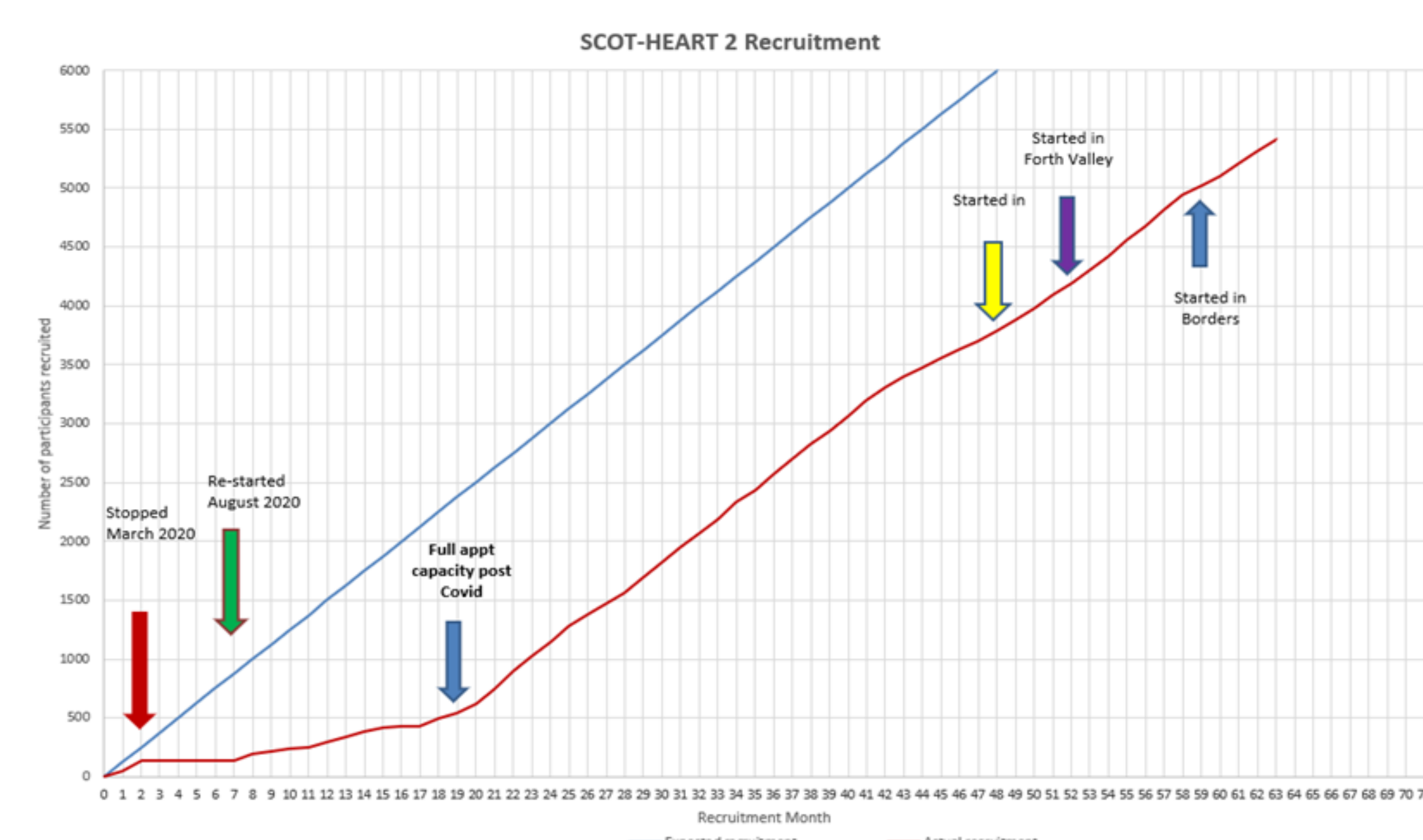


Figure 1. Location of practices that took part in SCOT-HEART 2 across **Lothian**, **Fife**, **Forth Valley** and **Borders**.

Conclusions

- Approaching eligible participants via their GP practice has been a highly effective recruitment method for the SCOT-HEART2 study.
- This study is an example of how recruitment in primary care can be of benefit to a secondary care study. Patients at risk of disease are unlikely to present in secondary care but have risk factors that can be identified in the primary care record.
- SCOT-HEART2 opened in January 2020. Recruitment was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. When capacity returned to normal, it was imperative that recruitment was consistently strong for the remainder of the study.
- Inviting patients from GP practices within NHS Lothian and neighbouring health boards provided this robust recruitment stream, with over 70% of recruits hearing about the study in this way.
- Mail-outs provided a more predictable and manageable response than launch events or advertising. The impact of mail-outs is greater than the results show as we know that many people self-refer after hearing about the study from someone who was directly contacted.
- The range of response rate is known to correlate with social deprivation ie the rate is lower from practices in areas of social deprivation and further work is essential to tailor materials to engage with this demographic.

References

- McDermott, M. *et al.* (2024). Rationale and Design of SCOT-HEART 2 Trial. *JACC Cardiovascular imaging*, 17(9), pp.1101-1112

