PCL/21/01 - Using and improving Scotland's care home data: a mixed methods programme of data linkage research and consensus gathering.

Moving into a care home is a life-changing event. It is often necessary to meet care needs which cannot be supported elsewhere and can be a positive choice. However, there is significant variation in use of care homes across Scotland and a lack of evidence about pathways into care. The NHS and social care sector collect large amounts of data through everyday use of services and audits of care. These data are a potentially valuable source of information, which could be helpful for researchers. Specialist skills are, however, needed to use and understand these data, ensuring privacy of individuals is respected and data are secure.

This application is to support a researcher and doctor specialising in the care of older adults to develop a work programme, she has initiated and led, to make better use of care home data to improve care. The research has three projects:

(1) Uses data collected by care homes linked to NHS information to look at pathways into care homes;
(2) Uses clinical audit data collected about those who have experienced a stroke to identify predictors of care home admission;
(3) Involves meeting with key groups who collect and use this data to understand their experiences and make recommendations for data use and improvement.

All data will be handled in secure environments, anonymised to avoid identifying individuals, but to learn lessons to improve quality. Exploring, describing and using the data will generate findings which will be relevant to practice (for older adults, families and front-line staff); researchers (through improved understanding of the data sources, their strengths and limitations) and policymakers (by identifying the role of care homes in society and the care landscape). Learning from new developments during the pandemic will help support sustainable systems for longer-term use.