Minimum Quality Requirements
Qualitative Research published on DIPEx International websites

The main goal of DIPEx International is to promote the spread of accessible, well researched studies of illness and health related experiences globally for the benefit of patients, professionals (both clinical and academic), health and social services, health care providers and carers.

By providing reliable, research based evidence about how people experience health and social care, we believe that the perspectives we publish on the DIPEx International websites will help people deal with health and illness related issues. A recent conceptual literature review suggests that the key health related domains that are likely to be affected by accessing online health experiences are:

- Finding information
- Feeling supported
- Maintaining relationships
- Experiencing health services
- Learning to tell the story
- Visualising disease
- Affecting behaviour


The rigor of the research is THE unique feature of the Health Experiences Research Group (University of Oxford) and DIPEx approach to health experiences; we consider it is vital to preserve this as the project becomes international. Many other websites include patients’ experiences in chat rooms, blogs, video stories. Our collections are the only ones that present interview extracts in the context of detailed analysis and a diverse, maximum variation sample.

The following 4 points represent the core elements of our approach to funding, team composition, training and assessment of research quality:

1. **Funding**
   The source of financing of any research for a DI website must be based on an ethical funding policy, as is used by the UK DIPEx charity. The websites should not carry any commercial advertising.

2. **Composition of the DIPEx International team in each country**
   Each national team must include:
   - a senior qualitative social scientist with a national reputation, a strong publication record in qualitative research and success in attracting major research funding
   - a clinical lead with a national reputation and good networks in different specialties (academic GPs are likely to be successful team members)
   - voluntary sector and user group input
While not compulsory at start-up, we highly recommend finding a health information specialist, health writer (editor) and links to a good website design team during the early stages of the first project.

3. **Training**

National groups who wish to join DIPEx International must attend a course in Oxford (for which fees are payable) to learn about project management and research methods. As DI develops senior researchers in other countries will be trained to run courses for newly appointed research staff.

A researchers’ handbook, prepared by the Health Experiences Research Group, will be provided to everyone who attends the course in Oxford. This handbook takes the researcher step by step through the process of data collection and analysis, writing material and selecting data extracts for the websites.

The research training is designed for people who are already experienced qualitative researchers and focuses on the specifics of conducting research to be DIPEx compatible.

A shorter training course is available for the project leads and managers who may not themselves be conducting research but need to be aware of project funding, ethics and project management issues including timelines and appointing/supporting research staff.

Note: if it is difficult to appoint sufficiently experienced qualitative research staff, the HERG group in Oxford also run regular training courses in qualitative research methods which English speaking staff could consider attending. See [www.herg.org.uk](http://www.herg.org.uk) for details of courses.

4. **How do we know the research is of sufficiently high quality?**

There are several ways that this can be indicated, even if language barriers mean that other members of DI are not able to review the material and outputs directly. For example:

- Is the research funded through a competitive, peer-reviewed research stream?
- Does each website include AT LEAST 30 interviews, 20 topic summaries and 250 extracts from the interviews?
- Are articles based on the research published in peer reviewed social science and clinical journals?
- Has the site been evaluated and demonstrated that the material covers the issues that are important to the patient group?
- Has the data been shared with experienced researchers for secondary analysis (and if so has this led to peer reviewed publications?)
- Are there independent assessments of the quality of the processes involved, or examples of the impact of the research and websites?
- Are the sites endorsed by voluntary organisations that represent patients experiences?