WHAT IS A **SWAT?**

To make clinical trials efficient, we need to use good methodology. To explore what methods are best, researchers can do a Study within a Trial (SWAT).

What is a SWAT? A SWAT (aka sub-trial/study, nested/embedded trial, trial within a trial) is a smaller research study often contained within a randomised controlled trial (RCT).

Key features of a SWAT:

- Contained within a host trial.
- Can be randomised or non-randomised.
- Can be built in from the start of the trial or added later.
- Should not affect the reliability, rationale or outcomes of the host trial.
- Can benefit the host trial by improving methods used.
- SWATs can be carried out at many trial stages, such as recruitment and retention or data analysis.
- For example, SWATs have assessed whether video and paper information together increases patient agreement to take part in a trial or whether sending text message reminders for trial questionnaires improves completion rates.
- Can be repeated across numerous host trials at the same or similar times (coordinated), or at different timepoints (individual).

SWATs: *small studies playing a big role in making clinical trials better*

Why are SWATs important?

- SWATs help researchers identify the best research methods.
- Healthcare professionals rely on evidence based practice (e.g., from RCTs) when treating patients.
- Researchers should also use evidence when deciding on how to run a trial; however, this is often limited.
- SWATs can help researchers pick the best ways to conduct trials, meaning more accurate research results and less time and resources are wasted.
- The findings from multiple SWATs can be combined (via meta-analysis) to provide stronger evidence about effective and ineffective trial methods and processes. This can make trials more suitable for participants to join and stay involved with.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Northern Ireland SWAT repository** (List of completed/ongoing SWATs, SWAT protocols)
- **Trial Forge website** (Evidence packs on recruitment/retention strategies)
- **Priority I and II**
- **Trial Forge SWAT Centre**