How Do Doctors Make Decisions About Surgery In Frail Patients
And What Factors Influence These Decisions?

RE Kitchen (1,2,3,4), RS Patel (5,6), G French (3) and C Faull (1,2)
(1) CPEP, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK; (2) LOROS Hospice, Leicester, UK; (3) Health Education East Midlands, Nottinghamshire, UK; (4) Douglas MacMillan Hospice, Stoke-on-Trent, UK; (5) University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, Leicester, UK; (6) The University of Leicester, Leicester, UK

Background
Frailty is a concept that describes decreased physiological reserve. Evidence shows that frailty is a risk factor for post-operative complications and increased mortality in the setting of cardiac surgery. Little is known about how decisions are made about surgery in frail patients.

Aims
1. To explore how surgeons and anaesthetists make decisions about surgery in patients who are frail.
2. To identify what training surgeons and anaesthetists would find useful in helping them to make decisions about surgery in patients who are frail.

Data Collection
Individual interviews were conducted with three surgical consultants, three anaesthetic consultants, three surgical trainees and three anaesthetic trainees. A paired interview was also carried out with a surgeon and an anaesthetist.

Data Analysis
Interview transcripts were analysed using framework analysis. Transcripts were coded and codes collapsed progressively using a constant comparative approach to develop an analytical framework. Using the framework, transcripts were charted and analysed.

Results
Four categories were identified during analysis: (1) concepts around frailty, (2) shared decision-making, (3) learning and (4) factors in decision-making.

Conclusions
1. Frailty was perceived as a multifactorial concept that has a negative impact on surgical outcomes.
2. Sharing decisions with patients was seen as the optimal approach for surgical decisions.
3. Anaesthetists and surgeons shared some perspectives but often had differing views on decision-making.
4. Reflection was seen as an important learning experience for trainees but less so for consultants.
5. The commonest approach was to aim for surgery and then consider the reasons for not offering this.

Future Work
1. A theoretical decision-making model about surgery in frail patients will be developed.
2. A tailored learning intervention will be designed for core surgical and anaesthetic trainees.

References