

From Questions to Conversations:

Engaging the Public in Head and Neck Cancer Awareness

10/10/2025

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David Rodgers, Patient Advocate, Co-Chair NICRCF Head and Neck Cancer Subgroup, leads panel discussion at 'Reels Research and Partnership,' Queen's Film Theatre, 27 March 2026

Overview

This PPI activity formed an integral part of an ongoing programme of Head and Neck Cancer research led by researchers at Queen's University Belfast, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Cancer Research Consumer Forum (NICRCF) Head and Neck Cancer PPI subgroup and colleagues at Ulster University. The programme focuses on improving prevention, early detection and outcomes through co-produced research, public engagement and knowledge exchange. It builds on prior outreach co-designed with PPI contributors and delivered during the Northern Ireland Science Festival, and responds to an identified gap in public awareness of symptoms, oral health and HPV-associated disease. Lived experience and public priorities underpin research design, delivery and routes to impact throughout.

Motivations

The primary motivation for this PPI activity was a persistent lack of public awareness of Head and Neck Cancer, despite rising incidence and poor survival outcomes when diagnosed at later stages. Through earlier co-designed outreach delivered to over 700 school and college students across Northern Ireland, PPI

contributors and researchers observed strong engagement but identified significant unanswered questions from young people about symptoms, prevention, HPV and the role of research. These insights highlighted a clear pathway by which research-informed engagement could translate into wider public benefit.

The funded activity aimed to address this gap while embedding lived experience as an enabling mechanism for impact.

Objectives

The objectives were threefold.

- (i) To co-produce a series of short, accessible videos that translated research evidence and patient experience into clear, meaningful messages for non-specialist audiences, particularly young people.
- (ii) To develop a scalable and measurable dissemination model that extended beyond in-person engagement by using digital and social media platforms to enhance reach.
- (iii) To strengthen and formalise relationships between researchers and PPI contributors by positioning patients as visible research partners and co-creators of impact.

Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes were both immediate and longer term. In the short term, the activity sought to increase

awareness of Head and Neck Cancer signs and symptoms, the importance of oral health and dental attendance, and the preventive role of HPV vaccination. It also aimed to amplify the visibility and legitimacy of PPI within the research process. In the longer term, the activity contributes to a sustainable programme of research-embedded public engagement, informing future research priorities, supporting demonstrable impact generation and strengthening the evidence base required for subsequent external funding and REF impact submissions.

PPI Activity

The funded PPI activity centred on the co-production, filming and public launch of a series of short Head and Neck Cancer awareness videos involving patient advocates, researchers and clinicians. Filming involved members of the NICRCF Head and Neck Cancer PPI subgroup alongside academic and clinical partners from Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Contributors were recruited through established, trusted PPI networks, ensuring representation from individuals with lived experience who were already embedded within the research programme.

In total, over a dozen contributors participated directly in the filming of seven videos, with additional stakeholders involved in planning, scripting, dissemination and promotion. The public-facing launch event, Reels,

Research and Partnerships, was held at Queen's Film Theatre in March 2026 and brought together patient advocates, researchers, clinicians, charity partners and members of the public. The event included video screenings, a facilitated panel discussion led by PPI contributors, and structured opportunities for informal dialogue, supporting reciprocal exchange rather than one-way dissemination.

Meaningful interaction was facilitated through a conversational filming format, with PPI contributors and researchers appearing together on screen and responding to real questions raised by young people during earlier outreach. PPI members shaped key messages, language, tone and framing, ensuring accessibility, sensitivity and relevance. Subtitles and short-form content design were used to enhance inclusivity.

Reach and Impact

Impact extended beyond the event through dissemination across multiple social media platforms. The first four videos alone generated 25,138 views across Instagram (15,025), X/Twitter via the JCRC account (9,873) and YouTube (240) by 26 March 2026, demonstrating substantial reach and amplification of PPI-informed research messages.

Key Outputs

Key outputs from this activity include;

- (i) Seven professionally filmed, co-produced Head and Neck Cancer awareness videos
- (ii) A public showcase event and

- (iii) Sustained digital dissemination across multiple platforms.

These outputs have strengthened the wider research programme by providing high-quality, reusable engagement resources that evidence meaningful PPI and support demonstrable pathways to impact.

Impact Highlights

For the research project, insights gained through co-production and audience engagement are informing future outreach, shaping dissemination strategies and underpinning plans to publish the PPI methodology associated with the campaign. Digital engagement analytics provide measurable indicators of reach and significance, supporting impact reporting and REF readiness.

For people with lived experience, the activity validated their expertise and positioned them as visible research partners. Contributors reported increased confidence, skills development and a sense of purpose in contributing to improved awareness, prevention and future patient outcomes.

Sustaining Collaboration

PPI will be sustained through continued collaboration with the NICRCF Head and Neck Cancer subgroup, building on established relationships characterised by trust, reciprocity and shared research goals. Contributors will continue to inform engagement priorities, advise on future campaigns and support

interpretation and dissemination of findings.

The videos will remain hosted on institutional platforms and reused in education, outreach and professional training activities, ensuring continued visibility and reach beyond the funded period. Ongoing analysis of engagement metrics, alongside contributor reflections, will inform iterative improvement and follow-on campaigns.

PPI contributors will be involved in evaluating longer-term impact and in co-authoring dissemination outputs, including publications focused on PPI methodology. This sustained partnership provides a robust foundation for future translational research, collaborative funding applications and REF-eligible impact arising from Head and Neck Cancer research.

Voices from the Event

“The event was such a fantastic showcase of the work and passion put in by the researchers and members of the PPI group. It highlighted the importance of these relationships and was really inspiring”

“This was the most heart warming yet informative event I have ever attended. The benefits of PPI was so clear from Laura’s presentation - as someone from a social science background, even I could understand it all. The videos are an incredible resource. I feel much more knowledgeable about head and neck cancer too.”

“As a clinician, the resources for patients such as the lymphoedema education video will be very valuable for my patients.”

“Education on HPV vaccine was very relevant as someone with school age children and I will spread the word more to increase awareness”

“Excellent speakers, and listening to those who have experienced head and neck cancer was extremely moving and renewed my enthusiasm to continue improving services”

“The incredible engagement and partnership between PPI & researchers, which was truly PPI led, each of the PPI speakers were unique and impactful in the delivery of their messaging”

Links to videos produced for Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Month:

[Head and Neck Cancer Awareness - PPI in Head and Neck Cancer Research](#)

[Head and Neck Cancer Awareness - What is Head and Neck Cancer?](#)

[Head and Neck Cancer Awareness - HPV and Head and Neck Cancer](#)

[Head and Neck Cancer Awareness - Voices of Research](#)

[Head and Neck Cancer Awareness - Signs and Symptoms](#)

[Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Campaign - Your Mouth, Your Health!](#)

[Head & Neck Cancer Campaign - Research in Action](#)