

Patients and Pathologists in cancer care

Gareth McKeeman, (Scientist, Clinical Biochemistry) shares the Belfast Trust Laboratories' experience of Public and Personal Involvement (PPI).

“It was a chance meeting with **Liz Doran** (a patient at BCH Cancer Centre), at a PPI training course, that started this journey.

We realised that patients can have a lot of questions about what happens to their blood samples and about how the laboratory is involved in patient care and this inspired us to look at how we could better engage with service users and promote the role of the laboratory and staff who work there.



With support from the Royal College of Pathologists we worked with Liz to develop a [podcast](#) which was launched as part of national Patient Safety Week 2020.

This involved Liz following the blood sample journey from clinic through to results being reported (including a lab tour) and then recording a conversation around the sample and patient *journey*. *This was just the beginning of our journey.....*

In January 2020, following Liz's guidance, a group of lab scientists who work in Belfast Trust Laboratories, then engaged with the Cancer Services lead for Personal and Public Involvement, Karen Kelly.

After hearing some of the issues raised around the need for better information for patients during the podcast work we were keen to explore how we could further develop our engagement with more patients.

Our aim was to assess the level of understanding from service users around lab testing, and to see if they were interested in finding out more about the pathology tests used for cancer diagnosis and treatment.

We also wanted to develop improved connections between the patient and the clinical laboratory and highlight the important role lab staff play in patient safety.

We met with Karen and Margaret McManus (the Information services manager) to discuss what approach we should take.

They introduced us to a range of tools and resources available to health care professionals to provide guidance on high quality patient involvement and ensure that any engagement was as meaningful as possible.

Karen and Margaret also **provided an overview of the role of the cancer services involvement group, facilitated an initial meeting with them and assisted with preparing a presentation by the lab team which introduced our roles and what we hoped to achieve.**

Our attendance at the group gave a rich patient perspective as well as further suggestions on how to enhance involvement.

We also asked those present to consider being part of a small working group led by ourselves to take this work forward and were happy to secure volunteers to assist. A small working group was set up consisting of those who volunteered as well as lab staff who work in the different laboratory disciplines (Biochemistry, Genetics, Haematology, and Histopathology).

The current focus of the group is to develop better information for patients around the importance of the laboratory role in diagnosis and treatment of cancer and to aim to reduce some of the anxieties and concerns around blood and tissue sample testing, including shedding light on some of the 'jargon' and terms used in reporting of results.

We have continued to meet remotely through the COVID-19 pandemic and further resources for patients are being developed with the group's input.

Linking with the cancer services user involvement group and PPI lead has been very beneficial in being able to drive this project forward and improve patient care.

They are a great team who are friendly, accommodating and easy to work with and have great expertise in patient engagement. This is a very useful resource for any others seeking to develop better links with patients and we would encourage others to use their support.

Picture 1: Liz Doran with Gareth McKeeman on a tour of the Blood Sciences laboratory on C-Floor, BCH. [Tour conducted before current COVID-19 pandemic]