

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in Research – Case Study

Provided by:

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How patients and the public were involved

From December 2014 – March 2015 Oxford Vaccine Group was a partner on the UK Meningococcal Carriage Study, a study led by the University of Oxford's Department of Zoology. The study recruited 18,000 16 to 19 year olds nationally, with 2,100 local participants. We recruited through sixth form schools and colleges across the Thames Valley, and gave a 15-minute presentation to an assembly at each participating sixth form (a total of around 7000 students). Additionally, as a way of 'giving something back' to schools, we offered each sixth form the chance to put forward three students for a one-day workshop at Oxford Vaccine Group. The workshop was planned to be informative, fun and interactive; we invented a disease, and took the students through the entire process of developing a new vaccine – from identification of candidate antigens in the lab to clinical trials and adoption by a pharmaceutical company, with opportunity for questions and for informal discussion with Oxford Vaccine Group staff. Around 60 students took part in total.

Feedback from students was very positive, with particular enthusiasm about the opportunity to visit our lab. Students felt that the ground we covered tied in well with what they were studying at school, and they also welcomed the chance to talk to Oxford Vaccine Group staff about career pathways; some said that the only 'medical' career path they knew about was becoming a doctor, and that this experience had opened their eyes to other possibilities. Comments included:

- 'The tour of the lab was the best since it gave me an insight into how researchers work and the equipment they use'
- 'Very fun and interactive'
- 'Having just recently covered immunity in biology, this was very useful in terms of revision'
- 'I have gained a more in-depth knowledge of the immune system'
- 'Good advice for pursuing a career in the field and detailed information about what we are learning at school'

A parent of one of the students also wrote spontaneously to say how much his daughter had enjoyed the day and to congratulate us on our 'innovative approach'. A short film has been made about the workshop for use in publicity and on the Oxford Vaccine Group website.

The impact of involving patients and public in the study

We intend to use the short film in future to show schools what we can offer, so that (resources permitting) we can continue to engage a selection of interested sixth formers in similar workshops. As part of a feedback meeting on the UK Meningococcal Carriage Study, we plan to approach students to see if there is potential for developing ongoing Public and Patient Involvement activities for young people interested in vaccine research.

Overall the workshop has:

- Educated participants about the process of developing a vaccine, and the work of the Oxford Vaccine Centre;
- Provided careers advice for students keen to pursue careers in biomedical science;
- Established good relationships with sixth forms across the region, which we hope to be able to

build on in future;

- Given a positive impression of Oxford Vaccine Group and helped to raise our profile, particularly in this age group;
- Provided us with a pool of young people whom we may be able to involve in PPI activities.

The importance of involving patients and the public in research

It is important for us to find ways of involving young people because much of our research is in paediatric vaccines. In particular, they may be able to help us with studies that are specifically aimed at teenagers/young adults.

The biggest challenges in PPI and what might help to overcome them

Establishing contact with schools was quite time consuming and might not have been feasible if we had not needed to do it to recruit to the trial. However, most schools we approached were interested and very supportive, and keen to send students to the workshop. The response from students made the time commitment involved in planning and running the workshops feel very worthwhile. We had originally intended to run the workshops before we visited the schools to do the swabbing clinics, so that the students who came to the workshops could act as ambassadors for the study. The tight timescales for the study meant that this was not possible in practice, but overall it did not seem to make much difference either to the experiences of the students who attended, or to the enthusiasm of the schools who took part in the study.

Setting up a PPI group for young people could present a challenge as the schools who participated in the study are spread widely across the region. In the event that physical meetings do not work, we plan to explore a more 'virtual' way of engaging students. The year 12 students who took part will be around for only about a year before they move on to higher education, so any group we establish would need to recruit on a rolling basis. However this may not be difficult to achieve, given the enthusiasm of participating schools and the fact that many sixth formers are keen to take part in activities that will enhance their applications to university.