

Humanising Healthcare

Service user involvement in the recruitment and training of radiography students

Q&A with academics
from City, University of
London



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Demystifying service user involvement

Involving patients and carers in healthcare education is crucial to excellent future care delivery. That's why Breast Cancer Now and City, University of London are collaborating to humanise healthcare, by facilitating service user involvement in the recruitment and education of future healthcare professionals.

Read our Volunteers' Top Tips on making involvement sustainable and effective.

Involving service users in as many aspects of the programme development and delivery as possible is required by the programme stakeholders, including the Health and Care Professions Council and the College of Radiographers – so how is it done at City?

'Patient volunteers make a huge contribution during the programme and have helped in many areas, right from the beginning in recruitment, to the course design and knowledge-sharing sessions... It's an opportunity to help develop their knowledge and understanding and really enhance the skills and practices of students.'

– Sam Penry, Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography

'I wholeheartedly recommend this to my colleagues at City and at other institutions. The impact that this partnership (working with the volunteers) has had on the students has been really significant – but also, as an academic team, it helps keep us grounded and makes sure our work with students meets the needs of the real world, that we keep the students and ourselves focused on the individual needs of service users.'

– Richard Thorne, Senior Lecturer in Radiotherapy

Q&A with City academics

Academics at City, University of London answer questions about how they introduced their programme of patient and service user involvement and what they've learnt.

What do your volunteers do?

'We've developed a whole raft of opportunities for volunteers to contribute to our academic programme and students' learning, including:

- Being involved in the selection day interviews for undergraduate applicants
- Sharing the experience of care they have received from radiographers
- Answering student questions and giving feedback
- Participating in the development and revalidation of radiography programmes
- Helping develop teaching materials or approaches
- Giving their opinion on how City monitor and audit their educational practice'

– Sam

How does it meet the HCPC standards?

'Service user involvement across the different elements of the student pathway ensures that students understand the centrality of the patient from the outset, it grounds the course in real experience and provides rounded perspectives that incorporate both technical and soft skills that are vital to create effective healthcare practitioners. It also offers opportunities for students to ask questions they wouldn't be able to ask in a healthcare setting, preparing them for what to expect and increasing their confidence and empathy.' – Richard

What's the benefit?

'My personal experience of working with the volunteers has been wholly positive – their input has been hugely valuable both to us as staff, and to student development and outcomes. They provide a unique perspective on the interview questions asked at selection days, and as an academic team it keeps us grounded and makes sure our work with the students meets the needs of the real world. Students give really positive feedback about their experience with the volunteers. Likewise, our placement providers have commented how well prepared our students are for their placements.'

– Richard

How much does it cost?

'Some of our service users come from far afield, and to facilitate their involvement on the programme we offer a reimbursement for their travel costs. For larger events, such as our in-person undergraduate recruitment events, we also provide a lunch and award them an honorary payment for their time. Ensuring that the deanery are aware of the benefits of service involvement can help with budget approval and overall buy-in.'

– Sam

How much time does it take?

'Some administration time is required to organise tasks ahead of the event/session(s). Providing sufficient support to service users is important to ensure they feel comfortable and that they can participate – for example, instructions and interview questions are provided in advance for our undergraduate recruitment events, and volunteers are supported on the day by a member of our academic team. Technical assistance is also provided in the run up to online events.'

– Sam

Have you had any challenges?

'It's worth acknowledging that when I first started working with service user volunteers, I was apprehensive – it was a newer way of working at the time and I wondered what

sort of challenges that might bring. On reflection, I need never have had any concerns because the relationship has only ever been beneficial to all those concerned. Our main challenge was recruiting volunteers, but working with charity organisations makes it a lot more accessible to connect with services users who want to become involved in this type of arrangement.'

– Richard

Who's responsible?

'We ensure the volunteers have one key point of contact for each involvement activity, i.e. admissions tutor for the selection day events, and programme directors for the knowledge-sharing days. We also have a main volunteer coordinator with oversight of the different areas volunteers are involved in, to ensure that this is managed well and not fragmented.'

– Edwin

'The benefits are huge – when our students qualify as radiographers, they will often be looking after other students in their departments. Those students looking up to their supervising radiographers will then learn those techniques passed down and will be more mindful of putting the patient first.'

– Sam Penry, Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography

'My hope for future practice is that these themes of empathy and sympathy get put in our students from the very get-go of their training – if we can instil good compassionate care in this generation of healthcare professionals, they will pass that on to the next generation and the next. So it's not just about current practice but about setting the standard for what will be carried forward.'

– Matt Carr, Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography

How did you get team buy-in?

'Initially there was apprehension about how to go about getting engagement from service users, what support would be needed and if it would be a mutually beneficial arrangement. However once there were a few people contributing, the benefits became clear and not only could the team see the benefits for the students, there were reciprocal benefits for the service users themselves.' – Richard

How did you recruit?

'The most effective route we've found is working with healthcare charities who have networks of volunteers who are interested in using their experiences to make improvements to healthcare. They advertise the opportunity to their contacts by sharing a summary of the role, what we're doing here at the university and what we need from them, and a basic expression of interest form. We set some basic criteria to assess against so that we could select appropriate volunteers.' – Soph

How do you measure the benefit?

'Students complete feedback forms after every volunteer-led session and knowledge-sharing days. We provide informal space for volunteers to debrief and share feedback so we can keep improving and check how they are finding it. Breast Cancer Now have also interviewed some of our students, staff volunteers, and produced videos sharing their experiences and the reciprocal benefits involvement brings.' – Matt

How do you manage the volunteers?

'We have a key point of contact in the team who oversees the recruitment and management of volunteers, working with colleagues to integrate them into different aspects of work. We listen to the volunteers and what they need, so we can ensure they're having a positive experience and can fulfil their role effectively. We treat them as part of the team, respecting the value they bring – not just their patient or service user experience, but also their work background and other skills.' – Matt

Thank you to everyone who has made this collaboration possible

Dr Soph Willis	formerly Strategic Practice Lead (AHP) and Senior Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography, now at Health Education England
Dr Edwin Abdurakman	formerly Admissions Tutor for UG Radiography and Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography, now at De Montfort University
Sam Penry	Admissions Tutor for UG Radiography and Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography
Matt Carr	Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography
Richard Thorne	Senior Lecturer in Radiotherapy
Susanna Glover	Patient Experience Lead, Breast Cancer Now
Breast Cancer Voices volunteers	Sue, Amanda, Fiona, Annette, Pam, Jan, Flora, Rocio

Find out more about the collaboration between Breast Cancer Now and City, University of London on our webpage: breastcancernow.org/humanising-healthcare

Contact Sam Penry, Lecturer in Diagnostic Radiography, for further information about developing your own patient involvement: Sam.Penry@city.ac.uk

Our volunteers share their Top Tips on what makes their involvement sustainable and effective: https://breastcancernow.org/sites/default/files/volunteers_top_tips_v3.pdf

Contact Breast Cancer Now's Patient Experience Lead, Susanna Glover, to talk about recruiting your own volunteers: Susanna.Glover@breastcancernow.org