

11. Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)

Other Parties Involved in Education and Training

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Introduction

Patients and the public are integral role to educating healthcare professionals; their involvement is essential for high quality education. The RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022 set out that “by involving patients and the public in a meaningful way, we can ensure that our curricula are focused on the right things; that our philosophy of education and training is truly patient centric.” PPI increases empathy, understanding of illness and improves communication.

Initiative

The Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (DVCAA) convened an institutional working group and appointed a Chair with expertise in PPI, and representatives from across the University. A critical development was the inclusion of patient and public partners on this working group. The group’s goal was to “embed patients and the public in RCSI education and research to enhance quality and its potential impact.” Several KPIs were defined and existing institutional PPI activity was mapped. Consultation with national and international exemplars allowed for benchmarking and gap analysis. Qualitative research examined key stakeholders’ views, experiences, and expectations of PPI, including the nature of the involvement and requirements for partnership.¹¹ This was needed to create a best-in-class model that encompassed training and development and celebrated PPI through a biennial event.



Panel discussion between patients and student at the event to celebrate patient and public involvement at RCSI, October 2022

Outcome

PPI has grown across RCSI. Patients are involved in teaching and students learn from real patient stories and can see real examination findings. Simulated patients, trained to portray a patient, can represent both physical and emotional aspects of being a patient. Professional actors allow students to practise complex communication skills. Surface models allow tutors to demonstrate physical examinations and provide students with the opportunity to practice. Patients and members of the public also participate in committees where they contribute to the future of healthcare education in RCSI.

An example is the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences which strategically embeds PPI and utilises all the identified approaches. Patient and public partners provide strategic oversight as are core members of the External Advisory Board. Patients and carers are involved in curriculum design.¹² Case-based learning is employed and patient contact sessions are embedded in all systems-based modules. Co-teaching supports the delivery of mental health education. Simulated patients and actors teach communication skills and assess these during objective structured clinical assessments (OSCEs).

The growth of PPI in education across the University continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, with patients getting involved in online learning. There was an unexpected advantage in that some patients found the online involvement more accessible. It featured contributions from patients and innovative PPI in medicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, physician associates, general practice, paediatrics, and surgery, highlighting the importance of continued PPI during COVID-19. With the postponement of the planned event to acknowledge and celebrate PPI a newsletter and pen was posted to the PPI partners to say thank you. Students have reported that PPI in Education helps them to build empathy and communication skills, and as one student said, “if you have talked to someone it is almost unforgettable – no book comes close.”

A large, and growing, number of staff now have experience in PPI in education. There has been international recognition through invited presentations and research publications from across RCSI highlighting innovations in PPI in health professions education. There are now plans to conduct research to measure the impact of PPI in education. Education partnerships with IPPOSI (Irish Platform for Patient Organisations, Science, and Industry) and INHED (Irish Network of Healthcare Educators) have been built, through co-production of patient-led sessions for the INHED conferences in 2021 (Involving Patients as Educators) and 2022 (Making a difference; Making it better). The Lead for Patient and Public Engagement is an invited member of the Education and Training Advisory Group for IPPOSI (May 2021) and is working with IPPOSI and INHED to establish a PPI special interest group in INHED. Facilitators of the RCSI model of PPI include growing evidence and recognition of the importance of PPI, leadership providing institutional vision and strategic development and building relationships to create a community of patient and public partners committed to educating healthcare professionals. The PPI working group have recommended that PPI continues to be strengthened in the next strategy, in keeping with RCSI’s mission of “placing the patient at the centre of all that we do.”