

Pathology on the screen – fact or fiction

The University of Cambridge has one of the few remaining dedicated academic departments of pathology in the UK and we felt it was important for us to support National Pathology Week. It was a welcome opportunity to engage with the public in our local community and to raise money for Campod (Cambridge Fund for the Prevention of Disease), a charity based within the Department. We chose an event that would appeal to a broad audience with which we would not normally engage. It was the first time that we have ever put on this type of event.

Nature of event

On 4 November, at the Arts Picturehouse in Cambridge, we presented a preview of the final episode of BBC's *Silent Witness* at a local cinema, with a panel discussion. We deliberately chose a very popular television programme to get the attention of our audience; a slightly risky strategy as *Silent Witness* is about a team of forensic pathologists with no relation to the work of the Department. However, the gamble paid off and by billing the event as 'Pathology on screen – fact or fiction?' we managed to achieve our overall aim: for an audience who enjoyed watching forensic pathology dramatised on the screen to come away with the knowledge that this was one particular specialism of pathology and that pathology was a much broader subject, not just about dead bodies, but about the investigation of disease and disease processes.

Dr Ben Swift, Home Office Pathologist and Advisor to the BBC, introduced the programme and was later joined by Professor Andrew Wyllie and Dr Chris Smith from the Cambridge University Department of Pathology to discuss their differing experiences of pathology.

The success of the event rested on the partnerships we developed with our sponsors: Cambridge Research Biochemicals, the Arts Picturehouse cinema, the *Silent Witness* Production Team at the BBC and a number of volunteers, all of whom played a vital role in the delivery of the event. The cinema screen was booked in April and it took several months to establish a contact within the BBC and to receive the necessary consents, before we could confirm and then publicise the event.

Publicity

Having chosen a venue away from our labs, we felt that the poster and flyer provided in the organiser's pack did not provide the right impression for our event, so we designed our own poster with a filmic look. Very small runs were printed in a variety of sizes and these were distributed locally to other University departments and via Addenbrooke's Hospital. To be cost-effective, we primarily used the internet and word-of-mouth to publicise the event. We sent an email with a PDF poster and booking form

through established networks: the University of Cambridge School of Biological Sciences; Cambridge Biologists (teachers from schools and colleges in the Cambridge area) and Addenbrooke's Hospital and to all known contacts, asking them to pass it to friends, family and colleagues. We featured the event on the University and Departmental website and it was included on an email to 45 000 Cambridge University alumni and featured in the cinema brochure. Our sponsor also helped to distribute publicity material through their networks. The local BBC news team were very interested in our press release but only wanted to film in a forensics laboratory and so did not pick up the story in the end.

The event itself

The event was free but tickets needed to be booked to ensure there was adequate seating. At the point of booking, we suggested a charitable donation. In addition to raising money for Campod, this also had the effect of increasing the perceived value of the event. We were advised that totally free events had a high percentage of 'no shows' and our ticketing system managed to avoid this. Approximately 140 people attended the event, with 50 attending a fundraising charity reception with drinks and light refreshments beforehand. The audience could broadly be divided into three equal parts: students, people working within the medical/scientific community and general public.

Despite a slight technical hitch at the very beginning of the screening, the evening went very well. Part 1 of *Silent Witness* was shown, followed by the discussion introduced and chaired by Chris Smith. Each panel member gave a short presentation covering:

- the realities of forensic pathology
- the life of a cold-sore herpes virus
- the significance of investigating how cells (as opposed to people) die (or not).

There was a little time left available for questions from the audience. These were regarding ethical issues surrounding pathology, which led into a discussion around the influence of legislative changes on pathology education. The evening ended with the conclusion of *Silent Witness*.

Feedback

We had a number of volunteers helping on the night and there was some confusion at times over roles and responsibilities, which could be overcome in the future by clearer briefings and delegation of roles.

Audience feedback has been very positive to date, in particular with regard to the discussion. It has been expressed that more time for questions from the audience and fewer presentations may have improved the event. Some general public audience members commented how interesting it was and that they hadn't realised that all those matters came under 'pathology', demonstrating that we had achieved our aim.

Some evaluation forms were completed and returned on the night. We also distributed forms via email and are still in the process of receiving feedback. A central online evaluation questionnaire might be useful for the future.

The future

It was an enjoyable evening for audience and presenters alike – with a good balance of entertainment and education. The cinema and the sponsor have expressed an interest in developing a similar event, which could be held in National Pathology Week 2009. We managed to raise a substantial sum for charity and have established a database of willing supporters interested in attending future events.

“A great evening – entertaining and informative.”

Jane Rich
Fundraising Co-ordinator, Campod
Department of Pathology
University of Cambridge



Dr Eric Watts

Lab tours and Transfusion Awareness Day at Basildon Hospital

At Basildon, hospital Governors were invited to tour the laboratories and a Transfusion Awareness Day was held.

On Friday 7 November, I ran one of the stands for the Transfusion Awareness Day. We had two microscopes showing a film of anaemia and a blood film of leukaemia. We also had demonstrations of how to tell someone's blood group and a display of how my hospital virtually eliminated

unnecessary transfusions. Many of the visitors were interested in the displays and knowing more about the background.

One visitor was there representing the Pernicious Anaemia Society. This is a condition that can be cured quite simply by regular injections of a vitamin. However, he advised me that 20% of patients do not feel cured and many have symptoms that they find disturbing, such as tiredness – not the familiar tiredness, but a “different sort of tiredness”. Some members of society have been disappointed with the treatment they have received from their doctors and some have taken to self-medication as a result. We discussed how to investigate the persisting symptoms and agreed on a comprehensive and holistic approach.

This meeting was an interesting reminder that doctors and patients can have different agendas, but for this discussion we agreed on how we could tackle the problem together.

Governor's tour of the Pathology Department



Dr Eric Watts
Department of Haematology
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