

Evaluation of 17th June 2009 first annual conference

What we did

In June 2009 Gengage held their first annual conference, ‘A genetic health service?’ to discuss issues surrounding the impact of advances in genetic medicine on the day-to-day delivery of healthcare services and to consider the role of education and public engagement activities in increasing public understanding and debate.

Participants

More than ninety people attended. They were interested in the event because:

- they represented charities or patient organisations;
- they were healthcare professionals;
- they were involved in policy making;
- they were academics carrying out research in this area; or
- they worked in public engagement, science communication or education.

Venue

We used a venue at a university in central Glasgow which provided a lecture theatre for plenary sessions, 4 seminar rooms with tables arranged “cabaret style” for workshop sessions and a breakout area where delegates could network.

Structure and content

- The day began with a welcome address from the Gengage Chair who gave an overview of Gengage and the aims of the conference.
- This was followed by keynote addresses on ‘Healthcare genetics in the NHS landscape’ and ‘Public Engagement’.
- Participants then attended one of four parallel workshops where they heard from speakers, discussed issues and shared ideas:

Workshop 1 – Direct to consumer genetic testing: a common framework of principles

Workshop 2 – “Genetic conditions are family conditions”

Workshop 3 – What is a genetic disease?

Workshop 4 – Involving “hard to reach” groups in dialogue and other activities.

- Following lunch, a plenary session on ‘Engaging the public in science’ was held before breaking into groups for the afternoon parallel workshop sessions:

Workshop 5 – How the press works

Workshop 6 – From consultation to engagement: tools for deliberation

Workshop 7 – Health in the age of “illness genes”

Workshop 8 – Telling tales: using stories to explore our lives, ourselves

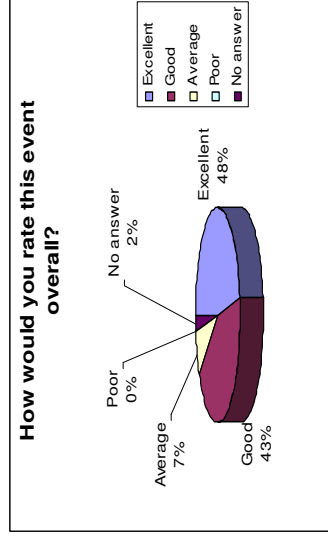
- A panel debate was then held to discuss the future of healthcare genetics.
- The formal conference was then closed with reflections on healthcare genetics in Scotland.
- Refreshments were provided and participants had the opportunity to network and continue discussions.

What people said about the event

“Overall excellent conference with some very thought-provoking discussions”

A participant

Those who attended the event provided very positive feedback which we collected by way of feedback forms. 91% of delegates said that they thought it was good or excellent.



What went well

“Thanks again for an extremely engaging and information packed conference”

A participant

- The conference brought together participants from a range of backgrounds including healthcare professionals, policy makers, patient groups, researchers, science communicators and public engagement practitioners. Such variety allowed for richer discussions and increased opportunities for information-sharing.

- The choice of workshops, including deliberative and training sessions as well as more exploratory discussions, ensured that all participants were able to select activities of value to them.
- We were able to revisit some of the issues raised at the Gengage launch conference such as the familial character of genetic conditions.
- Participants had the opportunity to contribute to the Human Genetics Commission’s deliberations regarding the principles that should govern direct-to-consumer genetic testing

What we might do differently next time

- Ensure that sessions do not overrun. While participants were sometimes reluctant to end discussions on particular issues, stricter time-keeping should be enforced in future.
- The workshops were designed to facilitate debate and discussion, but some participants still felt that some sessions were too didactic. We will explore further ways to develop this dialogue at future events.
- Some participants felt there was a need to focus more on specific issues or conditions in order to avoid too much generalisation. We will bear this in mind for future events and aim to provide more concrete examples from current research.

Find out more

If you are planning a similar event or would like to find out more about this event, please contact us on 0131 651 4750 or by email to genadmin@gengage.org.uk