

Conference report

A genetic health service? First annual Gengage network conference - 17 June 2009

Scotland is keen to lead the field in promoting public engagement around healthcare genetics, as was evident from the large and lively turnout for the first annual Gengage network conference. Over ninety delegates from across the country – and some from as far afield as Austria – gathered at the University of Strathclyde on 17 June to take part in a full day of talks, workshops and discussions.

Representatives attended from a wide range of backgrounds including Scottish Government, medical genetics and counselling, genetic research, patient groups, academics involved with public engagement, and others.

Under the heading “A Genetic Health Service?” the conference included plenary talks and discussions on the place of healthcare genetics in the Scottish NHS landscape, the nature and purpose of public engagement, and the future of healthcare genetics. Workshops were organised around practical and deliberative activities, and included sessions on how the press works and how to involve “hard to reach” groups in dialogue, as well as a deliberative discussion of how genetic services should deal with the familial character of genetic conditions, and a session that was designed to allow delegates to contribute to the Human Genetics Commission’s deliberations regarding the principles that should govern direct-to-consumer genetic testing.

The general sense of excitement amongst the conference delegates was amply confirmed by written feedback. While there were a number of constructive suggestions for how future events might be improved, the overall impression was strongly positive. One delegate said that it had been an “Overall excellent conference with some very thought-provoking discussions”, while another simply said “Thank you for a very impressive and inspiring conference”.

Dr Steve Sturdy, the Gengage grant holder, said: “Gengage’s mission is to build capacity for public engagement around healthcare genetics in Scotland. Gengage has only been in existence for a year, but today’s conference, with its wide range of activities and participants, shows that we have got off to a fantastic start. There is plainly great enthusiasm for public engagement among health care providers and researcher, patients and the wider public, and we are delighted to be providing a resource that clearly addresses their needs.”

A full programme, including links to powerpoint presentations and notes from the workshops will soon be available from our website: www.gengage.org.uk