



“Be Aware, Be Empowered”: Co-Created Learning Through Lived Experience and Partner Engagement

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Background

Raising cancer awareness:

- Remains a public health priority - early detection key
- Awareness of signs, symptoms and self-checking is variable
- Conversations about cancer can be uncomfortable or avoided altogether
- Local needs and priorities in Greater Manchester

Pharmacy education needs:

- Enhanced communication skills – sensitive, uncomfortable or emotional
- Support confidence, empathy and adaptability
- Develop public engagement activities
- Provide real world experience - limitations of simulation-based activities
- Consistency - difficulty in consistent opportunities on placements

Aims

- Equip pharmacy students with the skills to lead conversations on breast, testicular, and bowel cancer awareness
- Enhance person-centred communication skills and understanding of awareness across diverse communities
- Address low awareness and discomfort around early detection and self-checking
- Embed sustainable, partner-enabled service learning within the curriculum
- Enable students to apply their learning for community benefit while fostering responsibility to local and wider society

Partnership and Co-Creation

- Greater Manchester Cancer Alliance (GMCA)
- Lived Experience – Greater Manchester Cancer Voices Community
- Pharmacy undergraduate students



Be Aware, Be Empowered – What is it?

- Mandatory, credit-bearing, assessed service-learning activity
- Embedded within Year 2 of MPharm curriculum
- Spirals from established learning on cancer and communication skills
- Two components:
 - "Educate and Advocate" training programme
 - "Be Aware, Be Empowered" Cancer Awareness Event

"Educate and Advocate" training programme

- Builds on knowledge already gained in curriculum
- Interactive playful learning
- Explain self-checks for specific cancers
- Communication skills - accessible language, adapt messages for different audiences
- Respond to uncertainty or discomfort
- Public engagement skills
- **Co-delivered session with GMCA Cancer Voices volunteers – lived experience**



Photos of GMCA Cancer Voices volunteers



Photos of students participating in workshop activities

"Be Aware, Be Empowered" Cancer Awareness Event

- Deliver "Be Aware, Be Empowered" cancer awareness event
- Engage members of the public in supportive conversations
- Share key signs and symptoms of breast, testicular and bowel cancer
- Demonstrate self-checking using anatomical models
- Signpost to trusted sources of information

Direct observation of practice - Staff assess students in real time, focusing on consultation skills, professionalism, teamwork and leadership.

Designed by Annette Chisom Okeke

**BE AWARE
BE EMPOWERED**

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

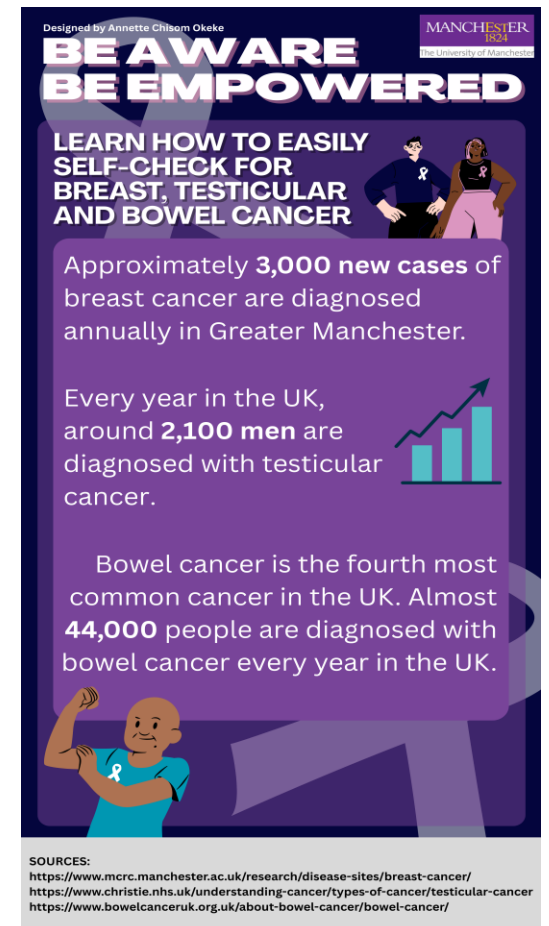
LEARN HOW TO EASILY
SELF-CHECK FOR
BREAST, TESTICULAR
AND BOWEL CANCER

Approximately **3,000** new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed annually in Greater Manchester.

Every year in the UK, around **2,100** men are diagnosed with testicular cancer.

Bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer in the UK. Almost **44,000** people are diagnosed with bowel cancer every year in the UK.

SOURCES:
<https://www.mcrc.manchester.ac.uk/research/disease-sites/breast-cancer/>
<https://www.christie.nhs.uk/understanding-cancer/types-of-cancer/testicular-cancer>
<https://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/about-bowel-cancer/bowel-cancer/>





Photos of students participating in events

Impact – Evaluation

- ▶ Evaluation aims to explore students' experiences of the activity, including perceived learning outcomes and preparation for future practice
- ▶ Voluntary participation in evaluation
- ▶ Ethical approval UoM REC
- ▶ Two components:
 - Anonymous questionnaire completed via Qualtrics®, including five-point Likert-scale and open-ended questions
 - Individual semi-structured online interviews conducted via MS Teams®
- ▶ Analysis
 - Questionnaire responses - descriptive statistics and thematic analysis
 - Interviews - reflexive thematic analysis

Impact - Evaluation

"Honestly, it's just nice to think that I might have helped someone"

- ▶ Repeated public interaction built confidence to discuss sensitive topics
- ▶ Experiential practice turned knowledge into practical confidence
- ▶ Lived-experience volunteers made the learning more real and emotionally meaningful
- ▶ Challenges in public engagement

"The volunteers raise your awareness of like how people are treated and like the different types of experiences people have. And also it helps you be more empathetic towards them"

*"It felt a lot more personal"
"It was very powerful"*

"I became less shy towards the end. I was actually able to go up to people and ask them to come to the stall, something that I've never been able to do before"

"It has helped with my confidence speaking about like, you know, sensitive topics...it's something that not everybody would like to talk about...it did help with like knowing like the right words to use, how to approach them and things like that."

"I found that workshop really effective because we were able to go through all the cancer signs and symptoms and like the self checks individually on our own before we went to the wider public."

Impact - Events

- ▶ Five events held between October 2025 – May 2026
- ▶ > 500 attendees at events
- ▶ Wide range of venues
- ▶ 151 Year 2 MPharm students





Impact – GMCA and Lived Experience Volunteers

Impact – GMCA and Lived Experience Volunteers

“If my story changes how one future pharmacist speaks to a patient, it was worth it.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of speaking at the University of Manchester to Year 2 Pharmacy undergraduate students, alongside two incredible patient representatives from the Greater Manchester Cancer Alliance.

We stood at the front of the classroom and shared our cancer stories, the real, honest, human experiences behind the diagnoses. The aim of the session was to help students develop empathy, understanding and practical insight into how people experience cancer, so that as future pharmacists they can engage with the public more effectively and sensitively.

I was nervous. I was fatigued. I’d had my immunotherapy injection on Wednesday and hadn’t slept well.

But I showed up anyway. And I’m so glad I did.

The lecturers were warm and welcoming, and the students were so respectful and genuinely engaged. You could feel that they were really listening. The questions during our small group discussions were thoughtful, compassionate and reflective, exactly what you hope for from the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Huge thank you to the University of Manchester, the wonderful lecturers and students, my fellow patient representatives, and the Patient & Public Involvement & Engagement Manager from the Greater Manchester Cancer Alliance for creating such an important space for lived experience to be heard.

Now I’m resting up for the weekend, grateful, proud, and reminded that our stories have power 🧡💛”

<https://www.instagram.com/thebreastcancerbird/>

Summary

- ▶ Reproducible, sustainable model for partner engaged/service-learning
- ▶ Preparing students for professional practice - not just knowledge, but confidence, empathy, adaptability and advocacy skills
- ▶ Partnership with organisations - socially responsible, impactful and sustainable learning
- ▶ **Power of connecting lived experience with education and learning**
- ▶ Future opportunities

Thank You

- ▶ GMCA – Rebecca, Naomi and Keisha
- ▶ GM Cancer Voices volunteers – Saeed, Russ, Tom, Julie, Brian, Karen, Neil, Paul, Carina, Mary, David, Ben, Duncan, Carole and Kathy
- ▶ Year 2 MPharm students for fully embracing this learning
- ▶ All the staff supported us with this initiative