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Barts CTU Newsletter

Barts Clinical Trials Unit

Queen Mary University of London



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A message from our Deputy Unit Lead- Dr David Collier



"You'll see in this edition of the Barts CTU newsletter that you've been a successful bunch! Adam's readership is so well deserved, and the achievements of Vicki and Rhian are highlights too- CProMetaIX sounds like a film franchise and TRANSFORM itself a truncation.

We'll also tell of the work on the Easy Patient Payment System (iSpent) co-designed with patients which has recently been subject to patient security experts' scrutiny and is going through Information Governance (IG) checks, and which was a favourite of the MSK team who held another successful Musculoskeletal Day with staff, patients and their families. Nadia gives us insight into the life of a QA manager- and we'd like to wish you and yours a quality festive season and a Happy 2026."

GOOD NEWS STORIES

We're delighted to share recent achievements from across the CTU team, highlighting the outstanding research, leadership and innovation driving our work forward.



Promotions & Appointments

Adam Brentnall – Promoted to Reader in Biostatistics.
Victoria Vickerstaff – Appointed Editor for Biomed Central's Trials Journal.

Study Milestones

TRANSFORM trial – Recruitment for the trial is now open! Read more about it in our **'Trial Updates'** section.

Funding Success

Rhian Gabe – Combining circulating biomarkers for accurate prediction of prostate cancer surgical outcome (C-ProMeta1X), funded by Prostate Cancer UK

Publications Spotlight

Our researchers continue to make an impact across leading journals. **Victoria Vickerstaff** published several papers in BMJ, PLOS One, and the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology on dementia care and ethical issues in clinical practice.

Adam Brentnall's recent work features in JAMA Oncology, British Journal of Cancer, and BMC Public Health, exploring cancer screening, risk prediction, and data-driven insights.

Rhian Gabe and **Emily Lane** were also published, with studies on AI pathology and prostate cancer trials, while **Francesca Pesola** published work on smoking cessation among people accessing homeless support centres in BMC Medicine.

🎉Congratulations to everyone on these fantastic achievements. A brilliant reflection of the talent and teamwork across Barts CTU!

TRIAL UPDATES

PROSTATE CANCER UK TRANSFORM

Since the last edition of the Barts CTU newsletter in spring, the **TRANSFORM** trial has made strong progress. Recruitment is now underway, with the first invitation letters sent to potential participants. The £42 million study aims to identify the safest and most effective way to screen for prostate cancer, an important step toward earlier detection and improved outcomes for men across the UK.

The study has already received strong media interest, with coverage on BBC News, BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Sky News, LBC, and The Guardian.

Two members of our Barts CTU team, **Professor Rhian Gabe** and **Dr Victoria Vickerstaff**, are featured in videos on the PCUK website, discussing the science behind the trial and details of recruitment plans to ensure a representative group of men are involved in the study.

Watch the videos here.

Listen to an interview with TRANSFORM's chief investigator Professor Hashim Ahmed on the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme here.
(Listen from 2:41:58)

THE FOCUS

Spotlight Study: CProMeta1 & CProMeta1X

The CProMeta1 trial, funded by Prostate Cancer UK (PCUK) and led by Professors **Yong-Jie Lu** and **Rhian Gabe**, is investigating whether circulating tumour cells (CTCs), the "seeds of metastasis", can help clinicians detect if prostate cancer has spread.

The study is following over 200 men who have undergone surgery, analysing how their CTC levels relate to cancer recurrence and progression.

Professor Lu, from the Barts Cancer Institute, believes there's even greater potential. Immune cells, cytokines, T-cells and other cancer-related markers may offer extra insight beyond CTCs alone.
That's where CProMeta1X comes in, an extension of the original study, also funded by PCUK. This new phase will combine immune and molecular data with existing clinical findings to develop a blood test that can more accurately predict recurrence and guide future treatment decisions.

CProMeta1X is now in its set-up phase.

CProMeta1X

PROSTATE CANCER UK

HIGHLIGHTS

A message from our Deputy Unit Lead

GOOD NEWS STORIES:
From Promotions to Publications

TRIAL UPDATES:
TRANSFORM

THE FOCUS:
Spotlight Study: CProMeta1 & CProMeta1X

TEAM TALKS:
Nadia Haidar: Quality Assurance Manager

PATIENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT (PPIE):
News from our Sub-Units

EVENTS:
NIHR Barts Biomedical Research Centre's second Musculoskeletal Patients and Families Day

TEAM TALKS

In this edition, we meet another member of our team, **Nadia Haidar** introducing us to a day in the life of a Quality Assurance Manager.



What does a typical day look like for you as a Quality Assurance (QA) Manager?

A typical day for a Quality Assurance (QA) manager can involve anything from chasing up mandatory training, to Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) review to preparing for any new regulatory changes in clinical trials. My week is a mix of working from home and coming in to work. I love hybrid working as it's the perfect balance between being able to get your head down and concentrate on more difficult tasks to thrashing out ideas with other people and appreciating the diversity we all offer.

What is one aspect of your role that people might not realise is so important?

I work with a lot of documentation in the form of either written procedures or reports. There isn't much flexibility to these formats so the least I can do is make sure they make sense and are clearly communicating what's being said or requested. The interesting part of preparing these documents is all the work that goes in to understanding them. Once written up they are usually quite dull, so the hard part is convincing others they need to read them.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your role?

The biggest challenges in my role are the changes to regulatory practices and how to incorporate them into the way we work (SOPs and training). You need a lot of support in QA as my area of expertise is getting the communication out but not necessarily knowing or understanding it all to start with. For example, changes that impact statisticians will need the help of statisticians, likewise with data management and programming. I was recently in Leeds for the annual QA meeting and one of the biggest challenges the group noted was the different ways our Clinical Trials Units (CTUs) respond and understand the new regulatory updates. It seems there are many interpretations, and this just highlights the complexity of them all. None are wrong and of course the focus will change CTU to CTU but making sure we communicate well with each other and having the approach that no question is a silly question will hopefully lighten the mood a little.

How do you communicate your findings to non- QA audiences?

Most of my communication with other team members is usually in the form of a request to read something or take some training or to highlight some upcoming training that may be of interest to them. These are usually communicated though email or staff meetings when I do the QA update.

Can you describe a recent project you worked on and its impact?

The UK Clinical Trial Regulations and International Council for Harmonisation's Good Clinical Practice (ICH GCP) have recently been updated, and changes will come into law and effect in April next year. I have prepared and presented slides which highlights the main changes our CTU is going to be impacted by. This is an ongoing piece of work for now and I am hoping more guidance will come from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Joint Research Management Office (JRMO) to enable me to shape the updates. The knock-on effect to this will be more (but hopefully small) updates to our SOP suite and other documents.

What do you find most rewarding about your work as a QA Manager?

I'm a very simple person and my work is mostly rewarded when staff give me the thumbs up that they have read their assigned SOPs and completed their training.

PATIENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT (PPIE)

This edition shares exciting updates from across our sub-units.

The successful **Heart-to-Heart 3** event for International Clinical Trials Day took place in May 2025, featuring trial participants' experiences. As part of the event, our Deputy Lead, **David Collier** led conversations with local clinical trial patients about their role in trials and their lives entitled ***'Whose Trial Is It Anyway?.'*** This segment also included Barts/Queen Mary University alumnus **Professor Sir Andrew Pollard FRS**, who dialled in from Oxford and an unexpected link to the Mongolian Covid vaccination shared by a trial participant.



Recordings from the event are available here.

TrialsConnect continues to pioneer new approaches with patients; in October, PPIE contributors with IT, finance and security expertise joined testing sessions with Danish iSpent developers for the co-designed **Easy Patient Payment System.**

TrialsConnect and the Barts Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) also hosted a joint stand at both the NIHR Clinical Research Facility BRC conference in Birmingham and the **British and Irish Hypertension Society BIHS Annual Scientific Meeting in Cambridge**, generating strong interest from attendees, including local medical students.

The team are interested in supporting more colleague's work, so do get in touch with **David Collier** for further details **d.j.collier@qmul.ac.uk**

Abida Firdaws (PPIE Programme Administrator) along with David, both from the William Harvey Institute, are collaborating with six NIHR BRCs to deliver a Researcher Inclusion Training programme focused on intersectionality, ethnicity inclusion and socio-economic disadvantage. Sessions begin mid-November 2025, with Barts BRC hosting one session in February. More information can be found here.

EVENTS

NIHR Barts BRC Musculoskeletal Patients and Families Day

In September, we welcomed patients and families to the NIHR Barts BRC's second Musculoskeletal Day. This informal event brought the community together with students, researchers, and clinicians developing new treatments for joint conditions.

The day included short talks, a research poster competition, and hands-on activities such as a lab tour, sensory testing, bioengineering demonstrations, ultrasound imaging, and sessions on living with arthritis. The poster prize went to Nia Sciucca for her work on innovative cartilage-repair approaches in osteoarthritis.

Attendees showed strong engagement, including those from underrepresented communities. The event sparked valuable discussions on disease management, treatment options, and lived experience. Based on this positive feedback, we plan further virtual and in-person activities in the coming year.

Ultrasound demo





Patients & Clinicians Q&A

Lab tour



Would you like to be featured in our next Newsletter?

Contact our PPIE Coordinator
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