

Eating for Eye Health

Overview and Context

“Eating for Eye Health” is a project run by research students and clinicians at UCL Institute of Ophthalmology and Moorfields Eye Hospital to involve patients and restaurants in East London in research on nutrition and eye health.

The project connected with East London communities and enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes patients. This was funded via the UCL Public Engagement Beacon Bursary scheme and the project was further supported by the Public Engagement Unit throughout its development and following its completion. Dr Rose Gilbert, lead for the project, has continued to develop this project and has won a national award from the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement for her success.

Background:

Results from the Age-Related Eye Disease Study showed that high levels of antioxidants and zinc significantly reduce the risk of advanced ‘dry’ age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and its associated vision loss. This project grew from the needs of those affected by AMD to harness diet as a means to help their condition, and to use cooking as a way to create a community and dialogue about the research into their condition. The project comes from the need to bring clinicians, researchers, patients and their families together as an informed and supportive community.

Based on this need, these aims were developed:

1. To educate the local community, especially the older adults and elderly, about nutrition and eye health, based on the latest scientific research findings.
2. To broker relationships between UCL Institute of Ophthalmology/ Moorfields’ Eye Hospital and the local community, in particular between students and the older adults/ elderly, which could lead to a self-sustaining “Eating for Eye Health” community.
3. To research the nutritional and cookery preferences and requirements of the elderly community.
4. To create a patient-led information leaflet with recipes about “Eating for Eye Health” which could be distributed to the elderly and patients at Moorfields’ Eye Hospital.

What happened?

Eating for Eye Health consisted of a focus group session, in August 2016 followed by a community cookery session in November 2016, for patients and their families and friends.

- Participants enjoyed a selection of delicious, healthy food from Pod (a café at Old Street) including falafel, tomato and Lebanese red pepper wraps, salmon cream cheese and wasabi sandwiches and a cornucopia of other dishes! During the food tasting, there were interesting discussions on awareness of how diet and nutrition influence health, how to tailor diet to optimise general health and how to prepare food to optimise absorption of nutrients.
- Participants shared stories of how their eye problems have impacted their lifestyle and their thoughts on the changing trends in diet and nutrition and what they perceived as barriers to changing their lifestyles.
- The morning was concluded with a short questionnaire on dietary habits and a positive evaluation of the event by the participants, who were all keen to participate further in the project and provide more guidance for research at UCL.



Facts and Figures

10 members of the elderly community involved in **1** cooking workshop at Pod, City Road

Further project funding successfully gained from UCL Liberating the Curriculum fund

2 public engagement awards won by the project team, **3** public film screenings of the project video, **1** related article in the Macular Society Magazine

The project was led by Dr Rose Gilbert, Clinical Fellow and PhD research student, and supported by staff and students

Emerging themes from the evaluation

Eating for Eye Health was a project that experimented with bringing together different groups related to eye health, and using cooking to disrupt usual hierarchies of 'expert' and 'lay person'.

The method of facilitating conversation between the participants (i.e. cooking together) was linked to research on the benefits of diet for health conditions. This gave the participants and leaders of the project an opportunity to converse as equals, while still grounding the day in the health issue that brought them together.

The project succeeded in its aims to educate the local community, broker new relationships, discover more about the cookery preferences and requirements of the elderly community, and to disseminate the learning from the project to wider audiences. Dr Gilbert adapted the format of this dissemination to better suit the learning from the project; she decided that working with a web format would be easier and more beneficial than a leaflet.

Eating for Eye Health ran with 10 local community members and this was an ideal size to ensure that each member was heard and had a chance to contribute in a helpful way to the cooking. The balance of facilitators to participants contributed to a positive atmosphere on the day.

The project has gained attention on a national stage, and beat stiff competition in the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's 2016 Awards. Preparing for and attending the awards ceremony was a positive experience for the team, who made new connections and gained new perspectives on their work.

The project created opportunities and built capacity for further work within the Institute of Ophthalmology and the Moorfields BRC

The use of a 'Community Kitchens' model of engagement was tested for working with patient groups, and this evaluation has proven that the model can be very valuable for creating lasting connections that contribute to research and treatment.

The monitoring and evaluation information gathered by the team has been helpful for them in understanding what the barriers are to healthy eating and dietary interventions, and this was shared with the wider patient community in the Macular Society Magazine. The team have found appropriate and valuable ways to share their findings beyond the direct project partners.

Further information is available at:

[UCL/Moorfields NIHR Biomedical Research Centre website on 'Eating for Eye Health'](#)

[Podcast interview with Dr Gilbert about the project](#)

[NCCPE Awards 2016](#)

Learning from the Process

What worked well?

- the team were flexible and supported each other throughout the project

- the project brought together researchers, clinicians, nutritionists, community kitchens and local older communities in a unique setting

- the local older adult community who partnered on the project felt more empowered to work with their condition, and feedback was outstanding

- the team have taken advantage of attention and praise the project has garnered to write articles and expand their work

What could be done differently?

- initially finding a cost effective venue for the focus group was challenging, with one venue pulling out late in the project

- the team had issues paying external people for services like photography, but overcame this by liaising with their department and the Public Engagement Unit

- the plan to create an information leaflet proved too complicated for this project, and was adapted into a website format

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