

Imagine not being able to recognize yourself in the mirror
– *see me*

Nobody asked about how it felt when I lost my voice – *hear me*

I will never be the same, even after dozens of surgeries and years of rehabilitation
– *heal me*

Project Background

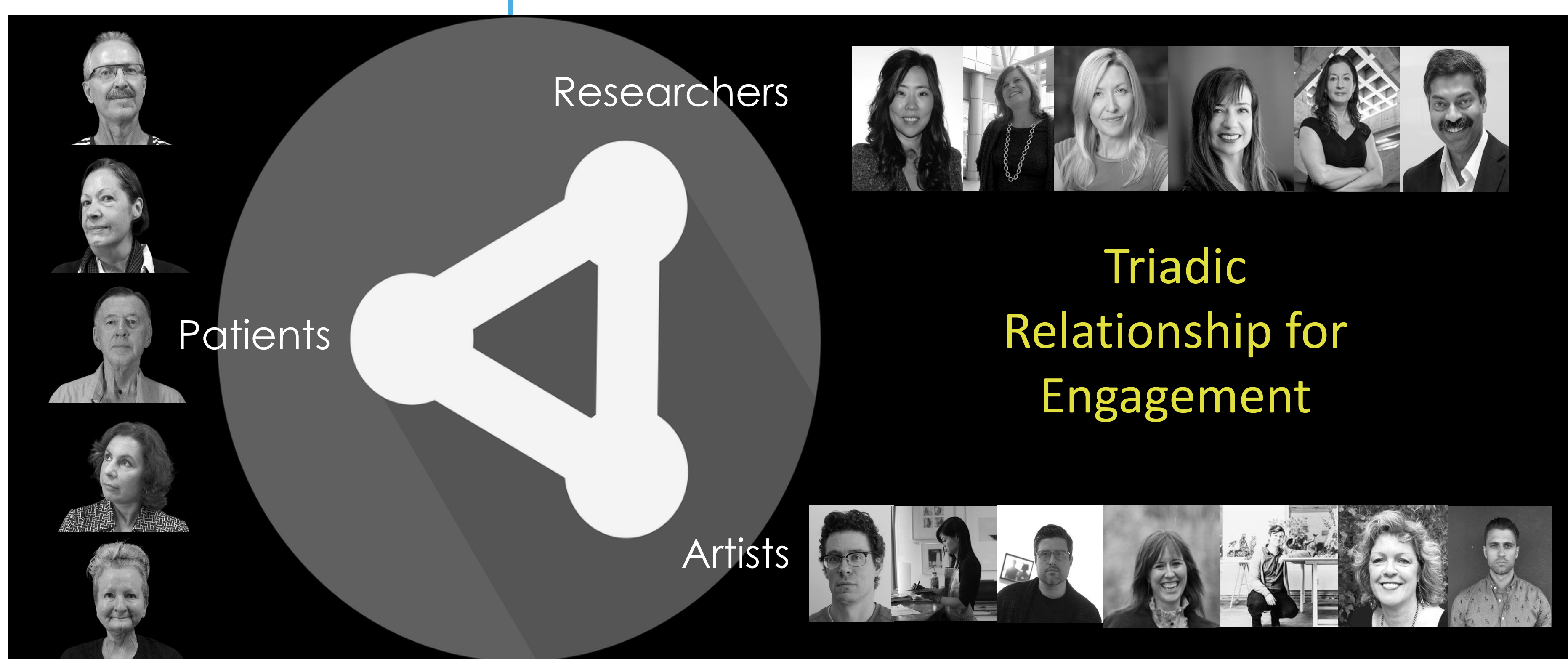
An arts-based knowledge translation installation developed, directed to both public and professional audiences, to make visible experiences of patients treated for head and neck cancer, which are often left unarticulated or hidden.

Objectives

- Promote awareness and understanding of head and neck cancer
- Provide an opportunity for community engagement and dialogue

Methods

- Participatory, theatre-based workshop that brought patients, family members, and health care providers, together with researchers and national and international contemporary visual artists.
- Workshop facilitator, David Diamond (artistic director of "Theatre for Living," Vancouver, BC¹) introduced a series of theatre-based exercises over the course of 1.5 days
- Images created by patients, family members and artists supported a co-intentional, evolving, iterative inquiry into patient and family experience of HNC (images were photographed, and discussion points were documented)
- At two points, artists and patients connected in pairs, as part of a "Walk and Talk with Me" exercise
- Participants offered closing comments in a large group; they were also invited to provide written anonymous feedback at the end of the workshop



Collaborative/ dialogical inquiry involves "a meaning-making process using language, including "spoken word, and any conveyance such as written words, sighs and emotions and the multitude of bodily actions such eye movements, and gestures" as its medium. It "requires a responsiveness in which a listener (who is also a speaker) is fully attentive and present for the other"²

Feedback Themes:

1) Sense of connection, and gratitude

- This wasn't the easiest activity for me but it felt genuine, ... I have another level of confidence that we truly seek to understand each other. What a rich experience to have in such a short time frame. Mind blown;*
- I was struck by the openness the workshop fostered and how it broke down barriers;*
- Overwhelmed (in a good way) by the generosity and openness of the participants. The progressive development of group rapport and trust was palpable.*

2) Early insights and questions

- The one-on-one sessions provided a lot of insights into the challenges patients face. I was struck by the willingness of patients to speak to the sense of isolation they can feel, and need to build community and awareness;*
- Recognizing the destabilization of identity, due to appearance changes, changes in sound of voice, etc. what do patients do to affirm their identities, or build new points of recognition?*

3) Hopes for the project

- Hopefully this should herald a new beginning in creating an improved awareness of this disease and influence policy, so that more support is earmarked for this disease and its management*



- Experiential knowledge shared through interactive, theatre-based workshops helped to :
 - foster a sense of group identity and engagement in arts creation/ research projects;
 - cultivate a reflexive, relational awareness supporting respectful, authentic collaborative inquiry among patients, artists and researchers.
- Informed by a dialogical ethic, this approach may be beneficially emulated and/ or adapted in other health research settings and contexts.

References:

- Diamond D.(2007). *Theatre for living: The art and science of community-based dialogue*. USA Trafford Publishing.
- Anderson H . (2014). Collaborative-dialogue based research as everyday practice: Questioning our myths. In Simon G, & Chard A. (Eds), *Systemic inquiry: Innovations in reflexive practice research*. Farnhill, UK: Everything is Connected Press.