



Opportunities for Optimal Referral Timing in Differential Diagnosis of Suspected Head and Neck Cancer Signs and Symptomology: a qualitative study of attitudes and perceptions of community pharmacists, and head and neck cancer patients in the North East of England

*Dr Andrew Sturrock – University of Sunderland [andrew.Sturrock@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.Sturrock@sunderland.ac.uk)*

*Dr Susan Bissett – Newcastle University [s.m.bissett@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:s.m.bissett@newcastle.ac.uk)*



# Project outline

- HNC is the 8<sup>th</sup> most common cancer in the UK, with evidence supporting increased incidence and mortality rates in areas of high deprivation (NE)
- Patients frequently present late with advanced disease
- Community pharmacists already offer advice to patients seeking OTC treatments for common symptoms, including those that may be related to HNC
- Therefore, unexplored potential to intervene early, to promote and facilitate health seeking behaviours and potentially refer patients at an earlier stage

# Project aims

- To explore the potential of community pharmacists to improve the rates of early formal cancer assessment, diagnosis and treatment for patients with potential HNC symptoms

# Project Team

The project is an excellent example of an applied multidisciplinary research collaboration and knowledge co-construction between pharmacy, dentistry and medicine, HNC clinicians and patients

Dr Andrew Sturrock	University of Sunderland	PI – Academic Pharmacist
Dr Susan Bissett	Newcastle University	PI – Academic Dental Hygienist
Professor Scott Wilkes	University of Sunderland	Academic GP
Professor Philip Preshaw	National University of Singapore	Academic Dentist
Professor Catherine Hayes	University of Sunderland	Academic – Qualitative research
Professor Marco Carrozzo	Newcastle University	Consultant Oral Medicine
Dr Adam Todd	Newcastle University	Academic Pharmacist
Mr James O’Hara	Newcastle Upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust	Consultant ENT Surgeon
Mr Mike Nugent	Sunderland Royal Hospital	Consultant Oral and Maxillo-Facial Surgeon
Mrs Rachel Lish	Health Education England North East	Clinical Lead for Multidisciplinary Oral Health
Mrs Deborah Howe	Northern Head and Neck Cancer Charity	Patient Charity Representative
Mrs Sue Mountain	University of Sunderland PCPI Group	Patient Involvement Representative

# Project timeline

- Qualitative methodology
- 1-1 interviews with community pharmacists and HNC patients
- March 2021 – August 2022
- Data collection to begin in mid 2021
- Development of potential future funding application in early/mid 2022

# Planned deliverables/outcomes

- Foundations and evidence to support a strong funding application for a feasibility study/clinical trial to determine the impact that pharmacists could have on improving the early detection of HNC
- Intended to have an impact at a national level, and result in changes to practice and diagnostic pathways, and ultimately improved detection rates resulting in improved patient outcomes.
- Academic publications and conference presentations
- Strong PPI and dissemination through charities and patient groups
- Involvement of HEE to develop future education/training where required

# Thanks for listening

- Please feel free to get in touch with myself and Susan if you have any questions