BTRU-GEMS holds 3rd Annual Meeting in London

The 3rd Annual BTRU-GEMS meeting was held over two days at Friends House, London, bringing together colleagues to share research and discuss the future of transfusion and transplant safety. Peter Simmonds welcomed attendees and introduced our new Unit Director, Professor Judy Breuer.

Dr Catherine Houlihan delivered the keynote on emerging infections and public health. Theme Leaders outlined ambitious plans for advancing blood and organ safety, while early-career researchers showcased diverse projects.

The Patient and Public Involvement session, chaired by Nikki Fagbemi, honoured the late Saj (PPI member) and featured a screening of What We Wished We Could Be, followed by reflections from the film's producer and a panel discussion with donors, patients, and NHSBT representatives.

The meeting closed with a forward-looking discussion on BTRU-GEMS' future and a celebration announcing Tom Browne as the puzzle competition winner.

BTRU visits Parliament for Sickle Cell APPG meeting

On 4 September 2025, Romisa attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Sickle Cell at Parliament, an important forum bringing together patients, advocates, clinicians and policymakers to address health inequalities.

Romisa commented: "a*ttending the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Sickle Cell at Parliament was an exciting and deeply meaningful experience. Walking into a committee room filled with patients, advocates, clinicians, policymakers, and supporters of health equality was inspiring.*

For many, the most moving part of the meeting was hearing directly from patients. Their stories were heartbreaking; accounts of delayed treatment, lack of understanding, and the emotional and physical toll of living with a condition too often misunderstood or neglected.

My biggest takeaway from the meeting was clear: education and advocacy for health equality must remain at the forefront."

Bringing BTRU research into the community

This winter, the BTRU in Genomics to Enhance Microbial Screening (GEMS), the BTRU in Precision Cellular Therapeutics (PCT) and NHS Blood and Transplant joined forces to raise awareness of our research and highlight opportunities for patient and public involvement.

We stepped outside our offices and labs to visit Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill Community Centres, areas with higher-than-average deprivation, where we joined healthy living events and connected directly with local residents.

With the support of PPIE Managers Cassy Fiford and Karen Shaw, our researchers and PPI members brought research to life through hands-on activities.

Visitors were able to:

- See blood cells up close under a microscope (Liz, Mara)
- Learn how cell and gene therapies work (Asja)
- Guess how likely a transfusion is needed in a person's lifetime (Vidushi, Tom and Shannah)
- Share how they feel about blood donation (Piya, Jaid and Rich)
- Vote on research priorities (Brenda)
- Create a fluffy blood cell to take home (Nikki)
- Share personal experiences of cancer, blood disorders and donation

Events like these remind us that research does not happen in isolation, it is strengthened by listening, sharing experiences and building trust within the communities we serve.

Thank you PPI members Nikki and Brenda and to the researchers for your support at the event.

"Helping out at community events was a deeply rewarding experience. From the moment I started speaking with attendees, I could see how powerful it was for people to meet someone who has personally received blood. Putting a real face to the impact of their donations changed the conversation, suddenly it wasn't just an advert or a general call to humanity but a tangible reminder of the lives they touch.

Throughout the events, I enjoyed engaging in thoughtful, heartfelt conversations and taking part in the wonderful activities. It was inspiring to witness the generosity of community firsthand and to play a small role in encouraging others to give. I'm grateful for the chance to be involved and look forward to supporting future events."

Nikki – PPI member

"I have gained so much being part of PPI, such as knowing my suggestions have been heard, and often actioned. I have also learned a lot, and have enjoyed meeting new people with a wide breadth of experience and knowledge, which in turn has increased my confidence in being directly involved in making a difference to research, and ultimately patient care."

Brenda – PPI member

Growing collaborations at the NHSBT R&D Meeting

On 21–22 January, NHS Blood and Transplant held its Research and Development meeting in Birmingham, bringing together BTRUs and NHSBT's research teams to share progress and strengthen collaboration.

The meeting provided an opportunity to hear about advances across transfusion and transplantation research. Professor Peter Simmonds presented an overview of BTRU-GEMS' work and reflected on the value of the event:

PPI Managers Lucy Kershaw (NHSBT) and Cassy Fiford also caught up at the meeting

"Attending the NHSBT Research and Development meeting in Birmingham was a really great opportunity to hear about the latest and often extraordinary areas of progress in transfusion and transplant, one particular highlight from many being the very important and useful presentation on the future use of pig-derived transplant organs and the progress towards this in the next 10 years, and related virological issues. It was great to meet up with fellow Unit Directors of the BTRU and to discuss ongoing future collaborative links with them in research and PPIE areas. Most importantly, a very valuable opportunity to meet and network with colleagues in the wider NHSBT."

Congratulations, Dr Michael Fu!

We're delighted to celebrate Dr Michael Fu, the latest student to complete a PhD in the BTRU.

Michael graduated from the University of Oxford under the supervision of Prof Heli Harvala, Prof Peter Simmonds and Dr Monique Andersson, with valuable contributions from Prof Will Irving.

His contributions to the BTRU, from impactful research findings to getting audiences dancing at annual meetings, will be fondly remembered.

Our warmest congratulations and best wishes to Michael!

Launching our updated BTRU-GEMS website

We're excited to announce the launch of our new BTRU-GEMS website, developed collaboratively with our Patient and Public Partners and researchers.

The refreshed site features dedicated pages for each research theme, clearer explanations of our work, and interactive elements including quizzes to help make complex science more accessible. In the coming months, we'll also be adding researcher and Public Partner interviews to further highlight the people behind the research.

A special thank you to all those who were involved in this website refresh.