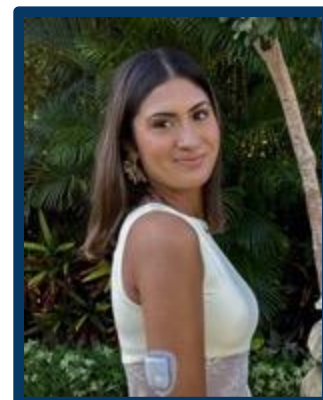


HCA Conference, Manchester, 18th June: Speaker and Panellist Biogs

Simran Bal, Clinical Pharmacist at Guys & St Thomas NHS Trust and Trustee, League of Diabetes Charity

Simran was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes shortly after her ninth birthday. Like many families at the point of diagnosis, hers had little understanding of the condition and didn't know anyone else living with it. The years that followed brought significant psychological challenges, shaping much of her early experience. Over time, through consistent support, open conversations, and a growing sense of ownership over her health, her mindset began to shift. She learned to embrace the condition, transforming frustration into purpose and refusing to let diabetes define or limit her.



She went on to study pharmacy in Liverpool and now lives in London, where she works as a clinical pharmacist at St Thomas' Hospital. In her role, she collaborates closely with patients and multidisciplinary medical teams, supporting care on a daily basis.



Living with Type 1 diabetes while working in a clinical setting gives Simran a unique dual perspective. She brings together professional expertise and lived experience, allowing her to connect with patients in a way that is both informed and deeply empathetic.

Alongside her professional work, Simran is an active advocate and peer supporter within the Type 1 diabetes community. She is a trustee for the charity League of Diabetes, which focuses on peer support, empowerment, and education through shared lived experiences.

She also shares her life with Type 1 diabetes on TikTok and Instagram under the name *T1 Diabetic Simran*, where she combines education with honesty, humour, and the realities of everyday life—alongside her love for fashion, fun, and living fully. Her content aims to normalise diabetes, challenge stigma, and show that it is possible to live confidently with a long-term condition.

At the core of Simran's work is a strong commitment to helping others feel understood, supported, and empowered—both in clinical settings and in their personal lives.

TikTok: @simranbal__ or T1 Diabetic Simran

Instagram: @simran.t1d

Website: www.leagueofdiabetes.org

Mo Christie, Head of Patient Services, The PBC Foundation

Mo is Head of Patient Services at the PBC Foundation, the leading global patient organisation for people affected by Primary Biliary Cholangitis (PBC). After first connecting with the Foundation as a patient in 2007, Mo later became a volunteer before joining the organisation full-time in 2023.

She leads the Foundation's patient support services and is passionate about ensuring lived experience is meaningfully included in healthcare conversations, research, and industry collaboration. Drawing on both personal and professional experience, Mo brings an honest and practical perspective to patient-centred care and meaningful partnership working.



Website: www.pbcfoundation.org.uk

Lucy Eddowes, Co-Chair, Passion Partnership and Scientific Director, Costello Medical

Lucy is Scientific Director at Costello Medical, a global, independent certified B Corp working across medical communications, value communications and HEOR. She is also Co-Chair of the Passion Partnership, under the HCA, alongside Elena Mills from The Salve Health.

Lucy has been involved in pro bono work since starting her agency career with Costello Medical and leads Costello Medical's extensive pro bono programme. She has an interest in developing pro bono capacity across the healthcare agency sector, to enhance social impact and meet the skills gap in the charity sector.

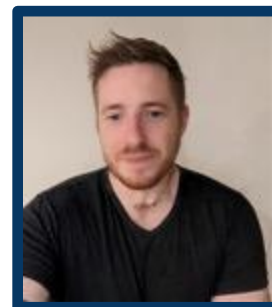


Website:

- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/passion-partnership/>
- <https://the-hca.org/Pro-Bono>
- <https://www.costellomedical.com/force-for-good/pro-bono/>

Al Franks, Social and Digital Account Manager, Envision 90TEN

Al has a strong background in digital and social media marketing across health, care and life sciences. Having previously worked as an auxiliary nurse, Al brings both professional expertise and first-hand insight into the patient experience. This perspective underpins a passion for using digital channels and social platforms to tell authentic patient stories, raise awareness, challenge stigma and support better health outcomes.



Al has led a wide range of digital and social initiatives, including content strategy and creation, always-on and campaign-based social programmes, performance analysis, social listening exercises and community-focused engagement. Alongside delivery, Al has also supported clients through training and mentorship, helping to build confidence and capability in digital and social marketing.

Kerry Leeson-Beevers, Chief Executive, Alström Syndrome UK

Alström Syndrome UK (ASUK) was established in 1998 and is a registered charity providing information and support to individuals and families living with Alström Syndrome (AS) and to the service providers working with them. ASUK works in partnership with Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham to deliver a highly specialised service, funded by NHS England. As a patient led organisation, the needs and wishes of people affected by AS remain at the heart of everything we do. We aim to; provide personalised support, raise awareness, conduct pioneering research, and enable better treatments and monitoring through the AS multi-disciplinary clinics.



ASUK co-founded Breaking Down Barriers in partnership with The Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust.

Breaking Down Barriers is a network of over 70 organisations providing support to people living with rare and genetic conditions. We work together to learn, develop, and share good practice. Promoting equity, diversity and inclusion is at the centre of what we do. Our Experts by Experience Advisory Group help us to understand the lived experiences of people from diverse, marginalised and under-served communities who are affected by rare and genetic conditions. We create safe spaces for learning and collaboration, deliver training, contribute to inclusive



research and run a community outreach project. We unite and strive for equitable access to services and support for all.

Kerry has lived experience as her son is diagnosed with AS which is an ultra-rare and complex condition. She is a patient representative on the England Rare Diseases Framework Delivery Group and is co-applicant on various NIHR funded research studies. Kerry has been involved in various UK, EU and global projects focussing on rare diseases, genomics and drug development and is experienced in patient and public involvement and engagement.

Websites:

- [Alstrom Syndrome – Support & Information](#)
- [Breaking Down Barriers | – Network](#)

Eric Ngwenya MPharm, Compliance Consultant, Compliance Hub

Eric is a pharmacist with a strong interest in respiratory medicine and hands-on experience working directly with patients in the NHS.

In addition, he has extensive experience in the pharmaceutical industry, having held roles across both commercial and medical affairs. This diverse background has given him a deep understanding of the Code and industry best practices.

Detail-oriented and proactive, Eric has a keen eye for data, with a particular focus on claims and substantiation, ensuring that information is both accurate and impactful.



“I continue to serve patients by helping companies create accurate, clear, and practical materials that enable prescribers to make well-informed decisions that truly benefit their patients. I understand the challenge of creating materials that are both compliant and impactful, but by using data thoughtfully, I believe we can achieve the right balance between regulatory requirements and meaningful communication.”



Website: www.compliance-hub.com

Catherine Priestley PhD, Global Head of Biopharma Communications, Fresenius Kabi

Catherine is Global Head of Biopharma Communications at Fresenius Kabi and an experienced corporate affairs leader with more than 25 years in the pharmaceutical industry.

She has held senior leadership roles at AstraZeneca, leading global communications, policy, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement across R&D and commercial organisations.

With a PhD in Medical Science, Catherine combines scientific expertise with strategic communications to influence healthcare policy, improve patient access, and support innovation across multiple disease areas. She is passionate about building partnerships that deliver better outcomes for patients and healthcare systems.



Rachel Pryzby, Vice President, Client Partnership and Growth Strategy, Patient Communications, Lumanity

Rachel is Vice President, Client Partnerships (Patient Communication) at Lumanity and a strategic health communication leader with 15+ years of experience helping organisations translate complex science into clear, actionable patient-facing communication.

Her work is grounded in health literacy and human-centred design principles — listening deeply to what patients and caregivers need, then turning that learning into messaging and experiences that support understanding, shared decision-making, and action.

Previously, she supported national-level health communications at CommunicateHealth, Inc. and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She serves on the Society for Health Communication Steering Committee and holds a Master of Public Health and Certification in Health Education.



Mercy Shibemba, Award-Winning Advocate; Health Journalist; Podcaster; Grant-Maker

Mercy is an award-winning advocate, sharing her story of growing up with HIV to educate, challenge and inspire.

She has worked on various community-engagement programmes ensuring that community voices are centered in science. In particular, she is passionate about ensuring that no one is left behind in scientific progress.

She is also a health journalist, podcaster and grant-maker.



Kersten Sharrock, M.S., Global Head, Integrated Patient Engagement, Sanofi

Kersten leads Sanofi's Integrated Patient Engagement as part of the Global Corporate Affairs Team. With 25+ years in healthcare, including significant experience within patient advocacy, Kersten joined Sanofi in 2012, previously overseeing Neurology Public Affairs and Patient Engagement Strategy for Specialty Care.

Driven by the belief that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, Kersten is accountable for an enterprise-wide framework to transform Sanofi from patient centricity to true patient integration, ensuring the patient perspective influences all aspects of healthcare delivery and innovation.



Website: <https://www.sanofi.com/en/patients/patient-engagement>

Derek Stewart OBE, Honorary Professor, National University of Ireland, Galway

Derek became actively involved in numerous aspects of patient involvement and advocacy at a local, national and international level following successful treatment for throat cancer in 1995.

Derek has a particular interest with health and care methodology research in making all studies as relevant, efficient and effective as possible.

In 2020 Derek was appointed Honorary Professor at National University of Ireland, Galway. He is a Strategic Advisor for the [Health Research Board – Trials Methodology Research Network, Ireland \(HRB-TMRN\)](#). In 2026, he



was appointed Honorary Associate Professor with the MRC Centre for Clinical Trials Innovation, University College London.

He is a Non-Exec Director for the [ISRCTN Registry](#) and an elected [Member of Cancer Research UK](#) (CRUK).

Blog: <https://wordpress.com/home/involveddotblog.wordpress.com>

X (formerly Twitter): @DerekCStewart

The HCA Activity in 2026 is sponsored by AXON, Envision Pharma Group, and Obsidian Healthcare Group Ltd.