

## How Patient and Public Involvement helped shape our public facing research stall

### Background

The Molecular Targets Advisory Group (MoTAG) works to help guide the research in the Molecular Targets Theme. This theme can be hard to explain to the public because it is based on lab work and molecular science. Molecular targets are tiny parts of the brain that researchers study. In the future, these targets might be used to help reduce symptoms of mental health conditions.

MoTAG is made up of different people, including researchers and members of the public. We especially aim to involve people who are often underrepresented in research, such as young people and older adults. We meet four times a year. Our goal is to improve public understanding of what molecular targets are and why this research matters for mental health treatment.

### What we did

Each year, Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre holds an open day at the Westgate Shopping Centre. Members of the public can visit stalls hosted by different research themes. When we looked back at the molecular targets stall from previous years, we realised that we could make it clearer and easier for people to understand.

Last year, our stall had shown how to extract DNA from a banana. We had also explained how people could try this experiment at home. While this activity was fun, it did not help people quickly understand our theme or how the brain works. It also did not show how molecular targets link to mental health research. After we realised this, MoTAG worked to create new materials. Our materials now are more relevant to our theme and easier for people to understand without needing to talk to someone.

In the end, the stall looked completely different from previous years. On one side, we placed a large poster that explained about the Molecular Targets theme and some of our current projects. On the table, we used dominoes to show how synapses pass signals across the brain. We also created stickers for people to take home so they could remember what molecular targets are.

### What difference did it make?

Thanks to MoTAG's ideas and hard work, the Molecular Targets Theme stand at the BRC open day looked far more engaging than the previous year. It was more colourful and more inviting. We believe the new design helped people understand the theme in a simple and accessible way. The visual tools, like the dominoes, made it easier to learn how the brain sends signals. The stickers were also popular, helping us spread information about the theme across Oxford.

MoTAG plans to keep improving the stall in future years by creating even better posters and visual aids to help more people learn about molecular targets.