

Thinkspace Workshops

I attended two workshops organised by Pfizer, called Thinkspace, in June and July. They were designed for patient organisations and covered four topics: funding, volunteer engagement, campaigning, and communications. I attended the last two.

Each session was attended by about 18 people, one from each patient organisation and related charities. Most if not all were considerably larger than ICPV, as they had been operating for longer and had permanent staff. Thus some of what was covered was not relevant, or at least impracticable, for ICPV. Nevertheless, it was useful attending, not least to hear of others' experiences.

The first workshop, called '**Engage for Change**' dealt with campaigning in the context of the new NHS, with sessions led by two representatives from National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), plus a presentation from Chris James, CEO of the Haemophilia Society, who explained how they had gone about getting policy makers and others aware of the problem of haemophiliacs being infected with HIV and/or Hepatitis C.

The main message was that to campaign effectively requires plenty of advance planning, making sure that the campaign fits into the charity's core objectives, engaging the help of others where possible-celebrities can be ideal-, identifying your audience, and working very hard.

Sam Taylor (Pfizer) gave an overview of the current government structure, and pointed out that patient empowerment appeared now to be an integral part of health policy (*no decision about me without me*) as was patient choice.

Perhaps the most useful part of the day was a presentation of the structure of the New NHS (attached, with my scribbles) by Sam Taylor. He also said that the NHS Commissioning web site was a useful source of information. <http://www.commissioningboard.nhs.uk/>

The second workshop dealt with **Communications**. The facilitators were two people from a public relations company (Randall Fox). There was also a presentation from Jane Heath of Breast Cancer Care on using social media. Her message was that it was necessary to see social media as an integrated part of the overall comms strategy, not as an add-on. Breast Cancer Care have one full time member of staff plus part time moderators working on social media.

The lesson of the day was that it is essential, when communicating, to be absolutely clear what your message is, and who are your audience. We all should be able to articulate ICPV's *raison d'être* briefly to all potential audiences. Ideally carry a few business cards and leaflets with us wherever we go on ICPV business!

Chris Finch, ICPV, July 2012

