

Parkinson's Research Outreach Network at the University of Hertfordshire

Report on 'Parkinson's Q&A with Professor Peter Jenner', Fielder Centre, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, 26 November 2025

PRONET

The Parkinson's Research Outreach Network at the University of Hertfordshire (PRONET at UH) was set up with the aim of bringing together people interested in research into Parkinson's. Everyone with an interest in finding out more about Parkinson's research is welcome to join the network, including people living with Parkinson's, family members and carers, researchers, and clinicians and other professionals working with people with Parkinson's. The aim is to decode and demystify research, providing a forum for exploring different aspects of research in ways that are engaging and informative.

Previous events organised by PRONET have included informal conversations with Parkinson's researchers at the University of Hertfordshire about their research, a panel discussion in which people with Parkinson's talked about what it is like to take part in research studies, and a visit to the Institute of Sport at the University of Hertfordshire to see demonstrations of equipment used in research studies investigating movement control and performance.

The idea for a 'Parkinson's Q&A' with a leading expert on Parkinson's research came from discussions with people in the local Parkinson's community. The format gives the opportunity to learn about the latest developments in Parkinson's research in an informal way, by asking questions and prompting discussion on topics of particular interest to the audience.

Professor Peter Jenner, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology at King's College London

PRONET was delighted to welcome Professor Peter Jenner as our guest speaker for a Q&A session on Parkinson's research and treatments. Professor Peter Jenner is Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology at Kings College London having been at the forefront of research into the causes of and potential treatments for Parkinson's for many decades. Peter has led internationally recognised research teams and published numerous research articles, reviews and chapters on a wide range of Parkinson's research topics. He has worked closely with the pharmaceutical industry and is a consultant for drug and biotech companies.

Widespread interest in Peter's visit was evident from the audience of over 60 people who gathered at the Fielder Centre, the University of Hertfordshire conference centre in Hatfield, on the afternoon of Wednesday 26th November 2025. Attendees included people with Parkinson's and their family members, clinicians and other health professionals who work with people with Parkinson's, and University of Hertfordshire staff and PhD students undertaking research relevant to Parkinson's. The format of the session was very informal with Peter talking through in a very engaging way answers to the dozen or so questions submitted in advance and 'live' questions from the audience. Topics were wide ranging from the causes of Parkinson's and underlying mechanisms to emerging treatments.



Professor Peter Jenner answering questions from the audience at the Fielder Centre

Summary of the Q&A

Is Parkinson's a single disorder?

A general point made in Peter's answers to several questions is that Parkinson's should not be thought of as a single disorder. Rather there is a lot of variation between individuals in symptoms and how the disease progresses even though the diagnosis is the same. This was demonstrated dramatically with a show of hands from the audience, only about half of those present with Parkinson's saying they have a tremor, even though tremor is typically considered a key symptom of Parkinson's. This has implications for the future regarding personalised care and who is selected to take part in which clinical research trials. Rather than grouping all individuals with Parkinson's together, he suggested organising participants into more specific subgroups, for example, by gender, age range, or predominant symptoms such as tremor. Designing group-specific interventions may lead to more targeted and effective treatments.

The brain-first/body-first hypothesis

Peter explained what is meant by the brain first/body first hypothesis, that for some people the initial trigger for Parkinson's may be in the gut and spread to the brain, whereas in other people the disease process starts in the brain and spreads from there. Parkinson's is then diagnosed when the process reaches the brain region containing dopamine neurons and disrupts movement control. But Parkinson's involves more than dopamine, with other neurotransmitters and brain systems being affected.

Questions about Parkinson's yet to be answered

Another theme in Peter's answers to the questions was there is a great deal still to be learnt about Parkinson's. Sometimes the most obvious questions do not have answers, for example why is Parkinson's age-related? Why is Parkinson's more common in men than women? There is some evidence that hormones may play a role, but this is not fully understood. Other factors could be at play such as men being more likely than women to be employed in occupations involving exposure

to chemicals. In recent years has there been increased research attention on women's experiences of Parkinson's, reflecting a wider need for more inclusive and representative studies

Does digestion effect Parkinson's medication?

A question from the audience about whether there is evidence of Parkinson's medication and dairy products working in conflict was answered vividly by Peter explaining the stages of digestion. Individual differences in the rate at which food moves from the stomach into the intestines where drugs are absorbed into the blood stream are at play here. Peter advised seeing what works for you regarding what you eat and when in relation to taking medication.

Caution about treatments offered through social media

There was a warning to be cautious of treatments offered through social media. This was in response to a question about stem cell treatments for Parkinson's. While bona fide clinical trials are underway investigating whether stem cells transplanted into the brain can replace lost dopamine neurons, it will be some years before there is definitive evidence from these trials. Check the research evidence carefully before paying for any novel procedure advertised online.

Donating tissue

Finally, in answer to a question about ways to donate tissue that might be useful for Parkinson's research, Peter spoke about the brain bank run by Parkinson's UK and Imperial College London. Donating your brain after you die gives researchers the opportunity to study differences between the brains of people who have Parkinson's and those who do not. More donated brains are needed, especially from people who do not have Parkinson's for the comparisons!

Note: for information on the Parkinson's UK brain bank see

<https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/research/parkinsons-uk-brain-bank>

Feedback

Feedback gathered from the audience at the end of the session was in general agreement that the event was very informative and that Peter was a very engaging speaker. Specific comments included:

"Excellent event, very informative and thought provoking."

"Informal but highly informative session. I like the fact that organised as a Q&A."

"Very informative and interesting session. Peter was entertaining and made the topic 'not scary'."

Thank yous

Thank you to all who attended and contributed to the 'Parkinson's Q&A with Professor Peter Jenner'.

We would particularly like to thank Peter for generously agreeing to speak at this event, and for his enthusiasm and patience, taking the time to answer questions on a wide range of topics.

We would also like to thank Christine Caine, Kiana Hassankhani, Alice Kingslake and Wael Mustafa for helping at the event.

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Future events

If you are not already on the PRONET mailing list and would like to receive information about future events, please contact pronet@herts.ac.uk to ask to join the mailing list. Events planned for early 2026 include University of Hertfordshire PhD students presenting posters and chatting informally about their research, and a visit to the University's modern computing and engineering and biosciences research laboratories on the College Lane campus to see demonstrations of current research projects relevant to Parkinson's.

If you are interested in a particular research topic relevant to Parkinson's and would like PRONET to focus on that topic at a future event, please contact the PRONET team by email at pronet@herts.ac.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

This report was written Lucy Annett, on behalf of the PRONET steering group: Lucy Annett, Rosie Brewis, Becki Hadley, David Harris, Ruth Herman, Mahmoud Iravani, Vivienne Levy, Khurram Mushtaq and Nada Yousif.

