

# Parkinson's Research Outreach Network at the University of Hertfordshire

Report on the 'Meet the Researcher' event, 30 October 2024

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## PRONET

The newly formed Parkinson's Research Outreach Network at the University of Hertfordshire (PRONET at UH) aims to engage Parkinson's researchers at the university with each other and with people with Parkinson's, carers, clinicians and other health professionals in the region and beyond. The PRONET steering group is made up jointly of researchers and people with Parkinson's. Sharing knowledge and experience from the theoretical to the practical inevitably results in all parties being better informed about the condition. Improvements in the lives of those with Parkinson's will hopefully follow.

Creating opportunities for knowledge sharing about Parkinson's research is a priority. To find out what types of networking events would be of interest, the local Parkinson's community was invited to workshops in April and May 2024. Ideas generated at the workshops included visiting the University of Hertfordshire to hear directly from researchers about the research projects they are working on relevant to Parkinson's.

We were delighted to welcome fifty people to our inaugural PRONET event, 'Meet the Researcher' on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The event was attended by 36 people with Parkinson's and their family members, joined by 14 university academics and other professionals working with people with Parkinson's. Given this was a new venture, it was apt the event took place in the newly built Enterprise Hub on the de Havilland campus at the University of Hertfordshire.

Following the discussions at the workshops, we wanted this event to be different and less formal than the usual academic lectures with powerpoint presentations. Instead, the researchers spoke about their research in focussed "conversations" with an interviewer and in answers to questions from the audience. The invited researchers, distinguished experts in their individual fields, and interviewers designed questions to give the audience an appreciation of the increasing knowledge of Parkinson's and the depth and breadth of research being done at their local university.

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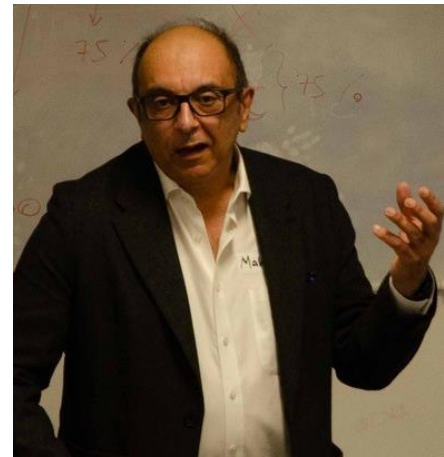
## The Research conversations

The afternoon began with an unusual theme, Professor Mohamed Lebcir from the University of Hertfordshire Business School in conversation with Ruth Herman on "Modelling health services for better care of Parkinson's".

Professor Lebcir would be the first to acknowledge that he is not from the world of neurology or a clinician. But he is an expert in building mathematical models which indicate how best to maximise the use of limited NHS resources. And as he so wisely says, the better the use of what we have the better the experience for the patient.



Professor Mahmoud Iravani in conversation with Rosie Brewis talked about research using nicotine-like drugs to reduce the dyskinetic movements that can be a side-effect of L-Dopa treatments for Parkinson's. Professor Iravani and his PhD students based in the School of Life and Medical Sciences at the University of Hertfordshire are also investigating a novel class of drugs that may protect dopamine neurons from the changes in the brain that occur in Parkinson's.



Dr Nada Yousif in conversation with Lindsay Bottoms spoke about her research using computer models to better understand Deep Brain Stimulation for Parkinson's. This research aims to improve the current clinical approach by improving the targeting of the electrical stimulation within the brain. The research is being extended to look at focused ultrasound lesioning in which sound waves are used very precisely to destroy a small region of the brain with the aim of reducing tremor.

In the final conversation of the afternoon, Dr Arezoo Amirpourabasi, a post-doctoral researcher based at the Institute of Sport in the School of Life and Medical Sciences at the University of Hertfordshire, spoke with Rebecca Hadley about her research on falls prevention in older adults and her future research plans, which include using a state-of-the-art treadmill to help people with Parkinson's improve their mobility.



Further information about the researchers and research projects featured at this event can be found on the University of Hertfordshire website:

<https://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/en/persons/mohamed-lebcir>

<https://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/en/persons/mahmoud-iravani>

<https://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/en/persons/nada-yousif>

<https://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/en/persons/arezo-amirpourabasi>



In a short extra presentation, Alex Eckford based in the Department of Psychology, Sport and Geography in the School of Life and Medical Sciences, demonstrated Virtual Reality equipment to be used in future research studies at the University of Hertfordshire.

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## Feedback

Thank you to those of you who sent your feedback on how you found the event, including:

“It was informative without being too technical”

“It was relatively informal but managed to convey all lot of new information”

and you liked “The Q&A format of the presentation, with questions asked by regular people and answered by experts studying the field”

After hearing the questions people asked, a researcher said they came up with a couple of great research ideas they will discuss with other researchers they met at the event. The event was also valuable for sharing contacts at another university undertaking related research.

Thank you also for your feedback on the practical arrangements and suggestions for improvements that we will take on board for future PRONET events.

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## Future events

Our next PRONET event will focus on what is involved in taking part in Parkinson’s research studies. A panel of people who have taken part in a range of different types of Parkinson’s research studies will speak about their experiences and reflect on the research process from the participant’s viewpoint.

The event will take place at Hampson Park Community Centre, Stevenage, from 11.30 am – 1.30 pm on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2025. Further details and a link to the registration form will be sent to everyone on the PRONET mailing list a few weeks before the event.

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](mailto:pronet@herts.ac.uk). We look forward to hearing from you.

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## Thankyous

Thank you to all who attended and contributed to the 'Meet the Researcher' event!



*We would like to thank Eva Lesovskaya, Wael Mustafa, Khurram Mushtaq and Emily Thompson for helping at the event.*

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*Report written by Ruth Herman and Lucy Annett, on behalf of the PRONET steering group: Lucy Annett, Rosie Brewis, Becki Hadley, Ruth Herman, Mahmoud Iravani, Vivienne Levy, Paul Williams and Nada Yousif.*

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