



Insights from the Network

LabPartners: Championing Patient Engagement at the Bench

By: Talston Scott, MHE and Madison Foster, MSc (LabPartners Project Officers and HQP) on behalf of LabPartners Co-Leads Drs. Manoj Lalu (Ottawa Hospital Research Institute), Dean Fergusson (Ottawa Hospital Research Institute) and Dawn Richards (Patient Partner, Five02 Labs Inc.)



LabPartners

Championing patient engagement
in preclinical laboratory research

While patients are the ultimate end-users of all stem cell research, their perspectives aren't always considered by research teams. The value of engaging patients as partners on the research team (not as participants) is widely recognized in clinical research.

Engaging patient partners (i.e., people with lived or living experience of a health condition or disease) on clinical research teams improves recruitment, generates shared learning, and enhances research relevancy. Despite potential benefits, patient engagement in laboratory research remains rare and understudied.

To help address this gap, LabPartners - our team of patient partners and researchers - has been funded by the Stem Cell Network to study and champion patient engagement in lab-based regenerative medicine research. We believe that integrating patients as partners in laboratory settings will help ensure that early phase research considers the perspectives and priorities of those who will ultimately benefit from it.



LabPartners Co-Lead Investigators (left to right) Drs. Manoj Lalu, Dean Fergusson, and Dawn Richards.



There are clear barriers to making patient engagement in laboratory research a reality. For instance, many researchers find it less intuitive to engage patient partners in the laboratory compared to in clinical settings. Moreover, physical barriers exist, as labs are often inaccessible behind locked doors and isolated from patients and the public. Importantly, lab-based researchers struggle to find guidance and resources pertaining to patient engagement.

‘How do I actually get started?’

To address this crucial question, along with identified barriers, LabPartners is developing a guiding framework and online platform. Drawing on foundational work to understand the current state of preclinical patient engagement, our team has identified principles, barriers, facilitators, and considerations to create a draft framework for patient engagement in preclinical laboratory research. Our next steps include an international, consensus-building survey to refine the framework, followed by field testing with teams of SCN laboratory-based researchers and patient partners.

Our online platform, www.labpartners.ca, is a one-stop-shop site that provides education, resources, training, and more, for researchers, patients, and organizations interested in preclinical patient engagement. We highlight stories of researchers successfully championing patient engagement in their labs, exemplifying the transformative potential of preclinical patient engagement. On the site, you can also read a policy brief created by our team on patient engagement in the laboratory. We regularly update the website with examples of preclinical patient engagement, guidance and resources!

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HOME RESEARCHERS PATIENT PARTNERS ORGANIZATIONS FRAMEWORK EXAMPLES ABOUT THE TEAM

WELCOME TO LABPARTNERS

Patient Engagement In Preclinical Laboratory Research

Involving the ultimate end-users at the beginning of biomedical research.

LabPartners one-stop-shop online platform (www.labpartners.ca)

Other ways you can be involved:

- Sign up for our LabPartners newsletter to keep up-to-date on patient engagement in laboratory research (please email Talston Scott tascott@ohri.ca).
- Let us know if you are interested in engaging patients as partners in ongoing or future lab research (please email Dr. Manoj Lalu mlalu@toh.ca). We can point you in the right direction, and potentially include you in our 'pilot field testing' by pairing you with patient partners.
- If you already engage patient partners in your SCN funded lab-based research let us know! We would love to learn about your experiences and potentially highlight your group on www.labpartners.ca.
- Look out for a future workshop session on patient engagement at TMM2024.

We are eager to promote and facilitate patient engagement in preclinical laboratory-based research. LabPartners is helping SCN investigators establish capacity, knowledge, skills, and partnerships in this exciting and innovative area of research. Together, we can ensure that patient experiences, perspectives, priorities, and preferences help shape the next generation of regenerative therapies.



LabPartners HQP Madison Foster and Talston Scott.