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**Position & Affiliation:** Senior Research Fellow, Chris O'Brien Lifehouse

**Full Reference:** Venchiarutti RL. Function and quality of life following maxillomandibular reconstruction: the Chris O'Brien Lifehouse experience.

**Conference/Meeting Name:** 14<sup>th</sup> International Head and Neck Quality of Life Conference

**Location:** Leeds, United Kingdom

**Dates:** 15 November 2024

**Presentation Type:** Invited keynote



**Above left:** Giving a keynote presentation at the 14th International Head and Neck Quality of Life Conference in Leeds.

**Above middle and right:** I visited the Newcastle University Centre for Cancer to present on my work in pathways to diagnosis and treatment of head and neck cancer, inequalities, and health literacy.

**Below left:** Visiting the Wolfson Institute of Population Health at Queen Mary University of London, I caught glimpses of the historic London Charterhouse buildings, with some most of the buildings dating back to the Tudor era or earlier.

**Below middle and right:** I spent two days at the University of Aberdeen visiting the Institute of Applied Health Sciences, exploring similarities and differences in caring for rural people with cancer between Scotland and Australia. Walking around the city showed why it's known as "Granite City"!



## **About the conference**

I was invited to give a keynote presentation at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Head and Neck Quality of Life Conference, which was held in Leeds, UK, on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The conference brings together a mixture of clinicians, including oncologists, surgeons, allied health practitioners and nurses with researchers who all have an interest in quality of life among people with head and neck cancer.

There was a wide variety of presentation topics covering many aspects of quality of life, including financial impact, social eating and drinking issues, speech and swallowing, and the role of physical activity and nutrition in improving quality of life.

An interesting area that led to lots of discussion was an increasing focus on the experiences of caregivers. People with head and neck cancer have high supportive care needs, many of which need to be managed by, or with the help of, their caregivers. More research and interventions for caregivers is needed to ensure they themselves are well supported through the cancer journey.

## **Knowledge and skills gained**

One important take away from this conference was that monitoring and managing quality of life and functional outcomes is everyone's business, no matter their role in patient care. There was a big emphasis on members of multidisciplinary teams working together to achieve optimal outcomes for people affected by head and neck cancer. Another key message was that there is no one size fits all approach to measuring quality of life. As people progress through their cancer treatment and recovery, they have changing needs and priorities, so keeping on top of these changes can ensure that people are receiving the right care at the right time.

It was wonderful to meet some 'giants' of quality-of-life research in this population whose work I have cited many times! I also connected with clinician-researchers who have invited me to visit their hospital and research institute next time I am in the UK, which was lovely!

## **How will these knowledge and skills benefit my current research?**

At my institution, we have a large program focusing on quality of life in people with head and neck cancer who have had jaw reconstruction. We often find that the tools (surveys) we use don't always cover what is important to this group, so we have to use multiple surveys which makes it very long. I spoke about this with delegates at the conference and one potential avenue is to develop and validate a new tool that is specific to people who have had jaw reconstruction surgery. This conference means I have key contacts across the UK and Europe who could collaborate on this with.

## **Relevance to the wider Sydney Cancer Partners membership**

Collecting information about quality of life among people with cancer is and should be core business – we're very good at using it for research but should make sure that it's also used to inform clinical practice to ensure that we use participants' data to have impact.

## **Personal highlight**

Seeing the exhibition at the Barbican called "I'm Not Ok" and reliving my teenage emo years.