

Learning communication at the Royal Shakespeare Company

Having difficult conversations with patients is a skill that all physicians find themselves needing to use. Dr Chris Farnham is exploring ways to teach these skills effectively with world renowned voice coach, Professor Patsy Rodenburg – using performance techniques taught at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

Chris, a palliative medicine consultant, has been a doctor for 33 years. He started as a registrar in London, working with patients with HIV. He soon realised that palliative medicine was what mattered to him – working with patients and those around them, often in quite difficult circumstances, led him to start exploring different approaches to communication.

He has led on several pieces of research involving London drama schools, which support clinicians to find communication approaches for their clinical practice. He has looked at placing doctors in actor training and the changes in communication styles. He has an interest in palliative medicine for marginalised populations and recently led the RCP and Association for Palliative Medicine faculty to Lahore, Pakistan.

Chris contacted Professor Patsy Rodenburg a few years ago when using her books, *Presence: How to use positive energy for success in every situation* and *The right to speak*. Over the past 45 years, Patsy has become a world expert on teaching voice, speech and presentation skills to individuals and companies across both corporate and creative industries. She has also had an unprecedented career working with actors in theatre, film and television – changing the way that actors speak on stage and screen.

As an educationalist, her extensive experience in examining human interaction on a theatrical level has given her vast insight into the qualities that are required for success in the corporate world. Outside the realm of acting she uses the humanities, including Shakespeare texts, to build effective communication paths and strong teams in the corporate sector.

Chris and Patsy met and immediately realised that they had a deep understanding of how they can help medical practitioners to survive some of the most difficult conversations.

The course

This course has been established by two practitioners, passionate about communication and voice. It will be

hosted by the RSC and run over 2 days as a residential course in Stratford-upon-Avon, giving participants the opportunity to work with one of the profession's top voice coaches and an experienced clinician, to explore their communication skills and gain an in-depth understanding of how they can optimise their voice and leadership skills.

Patsy examines what it means to have 'presence' through greater self-awareness and clarity, and teaches how to rediscover everyone's innate presence both physically and mentally. Her work also explores how to have presence when presenting, both in what one says and how one says it.

Participants are now being sought to spend time with actors from the RSC as well as working in a studio space, using classical text and movement and then applying these new skills to their clinical areas of work. This 2-day course will consist of one day led by Patsy – exploring voice with text, followed by a performance enjoyed by the group in the main theatre. The second day will be run by Chris – applying skills learned with Patsy into clinical practice with the help of trained actors from the RSC.

The pilot in early December is now open for applications. To learn more about this innovative new approach or to apply for this pilot or to learn more, please email Chris at Chris.farnham@nhs.net.

Closing date for applicants is 10 October 2025.

This feature was produced for the August 2025 edition of *Commentary*, the RCP's membership magazine. You can read a [web-based version](#), which includes images.

