



IN CONVERSATION WITH

Rebecca Porta

We were delighted to chat to **Rebecca Porta**, the new Chief Executive of The Urology Foundation (TUF)

First of all, many congratulations on your recent appointment as Chief Executive of TUF; can you tell us a little bit about your background and what led you into this field?

My career in the voluntary sector spans over 30 years and I've had the privilege of working for some of the UK's leading health and medical research charities including The Multiple Sclerosis Society, The Migraine Trust, CancerBACUP (now Macmillan Cancer Support) and the British Lung Foundation. I was the Chief Executive of Orchid Cancer Appeal, the male cancer charity, for over 11 years and led a period of transformation and growth which saw the introduction of nurse-led services, community-based awareness programmes, training for healthcare professionals and national media campaigns.

I knew Professor Roger Kirby and TUF from my time at Orchid Cancer Appeal and when the opportunity arose to join the charity I couldn't say "no"! Urology and urology health is a fascinating area covering a spectrum of diseases and issues, surgical techniques and treatments. It is a pleasure to be working in the urology community with so many inspiring colleagues and friends.

What are you most proud of in your career so far?

I'm incredibly proud of the charities I have worked for and the impact they have made. Whether investing in cutting-edge research and new technologies, training and supporting healthcare professionals, campaigning, raising awareness or delivering services – they have all significantly improved the lives of patients and their families. I have been fortunate to have a number of career highlights at each of the organisations I have worked at, but the ones which stand out are:

- At Orchid, launching the first Nurse-Led Support Service for men and their families, driving the formation of an All Party Parliamentary Group on Male Cancer, introducing Study and Travel Awards (one recipient presented to an

audience of over 5000 at the ASCO Annual Meeting) and working with Professor Frank Chinegwundoh and colleagues to secure a three-year grant from the Big Lottery – Reaching Communities Programme to raise awareness of prostate cancer amongst black African and black Caribbean men and disadvantaged communities. In 2019 Orchid was a runner up in the GSK Impact Awards for its outstanding contribution to improving the UK's health and wellbeing.

- A three-year partnership with ASDA raised over £1.3 million for Orchid and was a unique opportunity to work with their former Chief Executive, Andy Clarke and ASDA colleagues. Their commitment and engagement was incredible – from organising events and raising awareness of male cancer to touring the Research Tissue Bank with Professor Dan Berney.
- At the British Lung Foundation I was involved in the production and launch of the first television advert to highlight the impact of lung disease on people's lives. The advert was aimed at people who might not be aware that their breathlessness could be COPD and needed further investigation. The advert was broadcast to more than two million homes.
- I was at The Multiple Sclerosis Society in 1993 when interferon beta-1b, the first drug to be approved for multiple sclerosis was announced. That was an incredible moment – highlighting the life-changing difference that research investment and collaboration amongst scientists, clinicians, industry, patients, decision-makers and charities can make.

What projects will TUF be focusing on in 2022?

We have a number of ongoing programmes and grants and are committed to supporting more urologists and nurses where possible. One of our key flagship programmes is the TUF Trials Unit. Launched in 2021, this is a partnership with the Centre for Randomised and Healthcare Trials (CHaRT) in Aberdeen, to form the only dedicated urological trials unit of its kind in the UK, and possibly

worldwide. The role of the Trials Unit is to identify promising and important research ideas from urology units and provide a team of medical investigators to bring those ideas to fruition. This approach will enable more high-quality urology trials to take place, leading to better care, quicker recovery times and fewer long-term issues. We want to encourage as many urology departments and researchers around the country to bring their ideas for urology trials to the Trials Unit.

And what are your personal aims for your first year at the organisation?

Investment in research and support for our colleagues in the urology community has never been more needed alongside increasing awareness of urological diseases and supporting patients and their families. But we can't accomplish this alone and over the coming months I will be meeting with colleagues in the urology community, industry, decision-makers and influencers, patients and their families, funders and charities with an interest in urological disease.

What do you think are the most significant challenges facing UK urology?

There needs to be more investment in research. Whilst some disease areas attract significant support and funding, others lag far behind. A 'Cinderella cancer' – such as penile cancer – can be psychologically devastating for a patient but attracts little funding. Kidney stones are common, with more than 1 in 10 people affected – yet despite their impact and burden on the NHS they attract little research funding.

The burden on the NHS of urinary tract infections (UTIs) and urinary incontinence is significant. UTIs are a major cause in unplanned emergency admissions to hospital and are often a source of significant distress and frustration for patients. The Urology Foundation has funded several research projects into incontinence

treatments (including alternatives for mesh) and is keen to support research into UTIs.

Prior to the pandemic we were facing a shortage of specialist nurses and the last two years have added to this challenge. We need more specialist nurses, particularly in bladder cancer, and we need to ensure there is support and investment in training for our nursing professionals. TUF is running a dedicated course for nurses 'Unlocking Potential – The Power of Successful Communication' on 13 May in Birmingham.

How can Urology News readers get involved with The Urology Foundation?

There are a variety of ways for readers to get involved with The Urology Foundation:

- **Research grants:** we offer a number of research awards throughout the year – both scientific and clinical – to urology professionals, non-clinical scientists and those working in the field of urology.
- **Training programmes:** we offer training programmes which bring the latest techniques and approaches to those working in the field of urology. We offer a variety of grants for urologists and nurses seeking to travel throughout the UK or abroad to enhance their expertise.
- **Nurses:** nurses play a key role in the patient experience. We have a large range of programmes open to nurses, from research funds and travel grants to the TUF/BAUN Urology Nurse of the Year Award
- **Urolink:** in partnership with BAUS Urolink we offer four fellowships, to enable senior trainees to experience working in low or middle income (LMIC) environments.
- **Patient and public engagement:** patients and their families offer a unique insight into the world of urology from sharing their personal experience of a particular disease to helping shape and drive research. We are keen to build a network of patients and to ensure that their 'voice' is heard. If you work with patients, please tell them about The Urology Foundation.
- **Speaker panel:** we receive many requests to speak about urology health. There are opportunities to join the panel and support us with speaking events or developing video content.
- **Fundraise:** we offer a range of events and activities for urology professionals, their colleagues and patients who 'want to give something back'. From making a one-off donation, supporting a specific area of research or hosting a coffee morning, to taking part in treks, cycling and skydives, we have something for everyone.

And finally, if you have any spare time, what do you do to relax?

I'm a Trustee of Cancer52, an alliance of over 90 organisations committed to improving the future for people affected by rare and less common cancers. Led by our dynamic Chief Executive, Jane Lyons, we campaign to raise awareness and improve outcomes of these cancers through publishing reports, consultation documents, networking and discussions with a range of stakeholders including NHS England, Ministers and Parliamentarians.

I'm a member of various organisations including the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) and Women in PR. Time permitting, I try to attend meetings and social events.

Aside from the above, time spent with family and friends, reading, swimming and being walked by my King Charles spaniel is always welcome!

Many thanks for your time!

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the above please visit www.theurologyfoundation.org or email info@theurologyfoundation.org