

Screening- Its Complicated 5th Feb 2026- Reflective Piece

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Attending *Screening-it's complicated* fundamentally shifted my perspective on screening. Hearing clinicians reflect on their first-hand experience with patients engaging in commercial screening, alongside critical discussion of the ethical discourse surrounding national screening programmes, emphasised the complexity underpinning what I previously viewed as a straightforward public health intervention. Angela Raffle's keynote, which delineated the evolution of screening from a paternalistic model valuing uptake above all else, to one prioritising informed choice and risk stratification, particularly resonated with me. It underscored the power of language in communicating evidence and the responsibility held by those of us who interpret and generate that evidence- clinicians, policymakers, and public health professionals- in shaping patient's and wider public understanding on the topic. The interactive "masterclass" further deepened my grasp of key screening concepts and statistics transforming abstract principles into practical tools and facilitating meaningful dialogue with my peers about both personal and professional encounters with screening.

I also valued the multidisciplinary outlook adopted throughout the day. Professor Orr's discussion of "discursive legitimacy" shed light on how both policymakers and public perceptions are shaped not only by evidence, but by narrative and framing. Similarly, Dr Postan's exploration of identity and its influence on those who participate in screening reinforced to me the importance of recognising that decisions must be guided by not only evidence, but by the individual's own values and lived experiences. Hearing from the Deputy Director of the UK National Screening Committee about the challenges facing Scottish policy added another factor to consider- while we may understand the ethical foundations of screening in theory, implementing them within political, financial and societal constraints is far more complex.

In the closing reflection by Richard Faggio, he stated "Let's celebrate a system we are proud of" while emphasising our ongoing responsibility to build trust, participate openly in ethical dialogue, and "hold firm" to the ethical principles underpinning quality screening practices. The event left me to reflect on my own approach as a future clinician in navigating the tensions between evidence, policy and individuals value, and how I can contribute to screening practices that are not only effective, but where evidence is communicated honestly and patient choice remains at the forefront of care.