

# *The* Storytelling Playbook:

The secrets behind successful branded healthcare stories





A photograph of two men in a clinical or hospital setting. On the left, a younger man with dark hair, wearing a light blue patterned hospital gown, looks down. On the right, an older man with grey hair, wearing a white lab coat over a blue shirt and tie, points his right index finger towards the younger man. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# Welcome *to the* report

In 2025, healthcare dynamics are more complex than ever. There have been rapid advancements in innovation, while intersecting collective challenges impact the sector and touch upon climate, economy and society.

At BBC StoryWorks Commercial Productions, we know how important compelling storytelling is. The branded content films we have produced on behalf of clients have won awards and been screened around the world – from Harvard School of Public Health to COP to the United Nations – and have been able to grow awareness, shift perceptions and deepen understanding with global audiences. As the healthcare sector continues to face substantial challenges, this health insights report from BBC StoryWorks sets out to provide insight, inspiration, and ideas for those seeking to make relevant, engaging compelling content.



# What to expect *from the* report?

## Audience Framework

Who is engaging with health content?

## Insider View

What are healthcare experts saying?

## Creative Insights

How do we tell compelling health stories?





The branded content series we have produced have sought to answer these questions:

- What are the most fundamental threats to human health?
- How can we ensure our healthcare systems are fit for the future?
- How can we better support healthcare professionals in their work?
- How can we enhance public awareness and engagement in prevention and care?
- How are advancements in technology providing breakthroughs in diagnostics and treatment?

We are proud to have produced branded health stories for the below partners...





I couldn't be prouder of the content our team produces for global brands – storytelling isn't just entertainment, it can be a catalyst for real change.

Nowhere is that more critical than in healthcare, where the right story can shift perspectives, spark action and make a tangible difference.



**Gemma Jennings**

Global vice president  
Programme Partnerships, BBC StoryWorks

We're privileged to bring vital stories to life – of resilience, innovation and the people shaping our healthcare systems. From patients and frontline workers, to global leaders, we're continually learning from our interactions with both the healthcare sector and our global audiences, and we're committed to producing content to help organisations spotlight the issues that matter.

It's incredibly motivating to see the work we have produced for brands making an impact on the global stage – an honour to be able to speak about it at the UN, to see it played at COP, to be invited to champion the power of storytelling at global healthcare and industry events. These moments reinforce to me why this work matters.

As the world faces complex healthcare challenges, the power of storytelling has never been more urgent. Simply put, the stories we tell today have the power to shape a better, healthier tomorrow.”



A dimly lit hospital ward with several empty beds and a nurse attending to a patient. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with low-key lighting, creating a somber and quiet atmosphere. The nurse, wearing a green uniform and cap, stands by a bed where a patient in a green patterned hijab is sitting up. The ward has multiple beds with white frames and blue accents, and the walls are a light green color. The overall mood is one of care and quiet observation.

Who is engaging  
*with* health content  
today?



# Our Audience Tools

Where should we begin? At BBC StoryWorks we start by understanding the audience. Understanding your audience is at the heart of every successful story.

Using our powerful suite of tools we've uncovered actionable insights into what drives engagement and resonates with viewers.

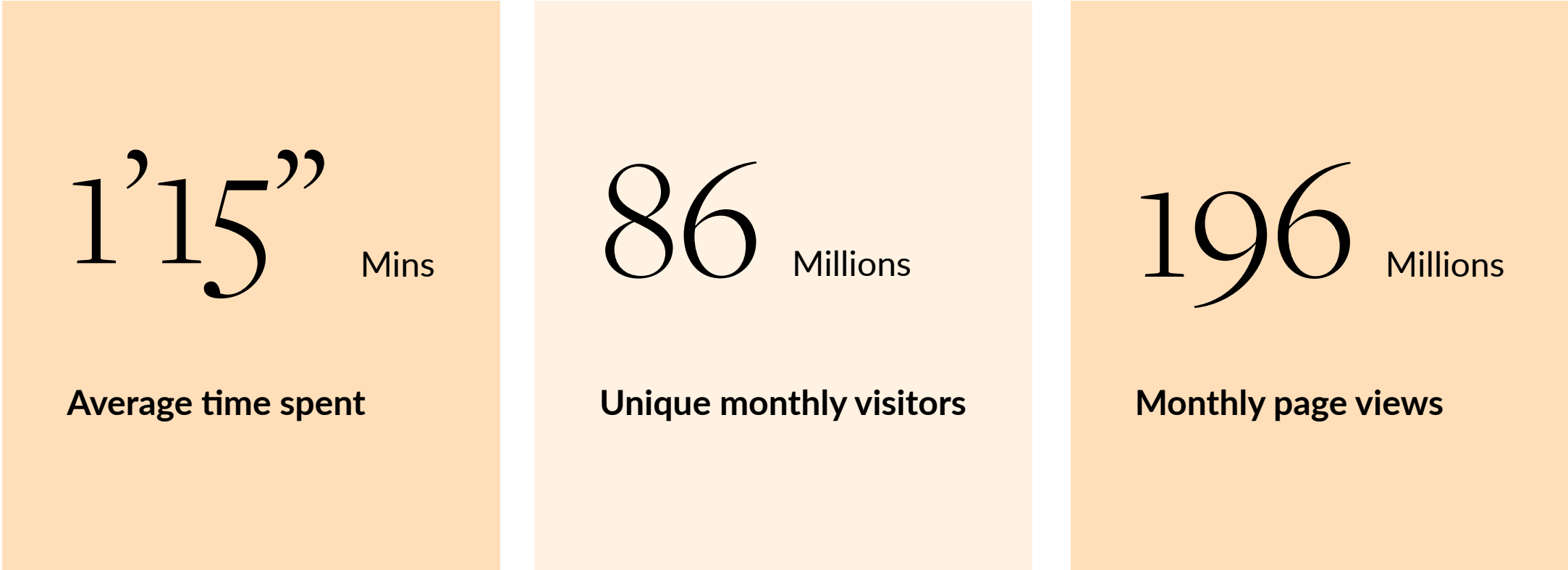
## The audience tools

**Global Minds:** A tool used to test creative and measure audience perceptions globally. For this project, we surveyed over 6,500 BBC.com audience members across five regions (APAC, Europe, Africa, North America, South America), representing diverse age groups and genders.

**Audience cohorts:** We utilise an audience activation platform to build cohorts based on first-party behaviour and declared data on BBC.com. This tool offers insights into topics of interest, content consumption and demographics across various sectors, including healthcare.



## Health content on BBC.com attracts significant audiences



Source: Permutive 8/4/2025-7/5/2025. Health Readers 3.0



# BBC.com attracts an *affluent,* *tech-savvy* health audience...

The **health professionals** cohort on BBC.com has consistent crossover with our **finance, technology and travel** readers.

1/4

Of our health professionals are 'financial leaders'

83%

Crossover between health professionals and 'culture and lifestyle readers'

1/4

Of our health professionals are 'AI readers'

22%

Of our health professionals are 'financial decision makers'

15%

Crossover between health professionals and 'Discovery Travel' readers on BBC.com

16%

Of our health professionals are 'technology industry readers'



Our health professionals audience are based globally and have varied interests

41 %

Are regular readers of BBC Earth

1 in 2

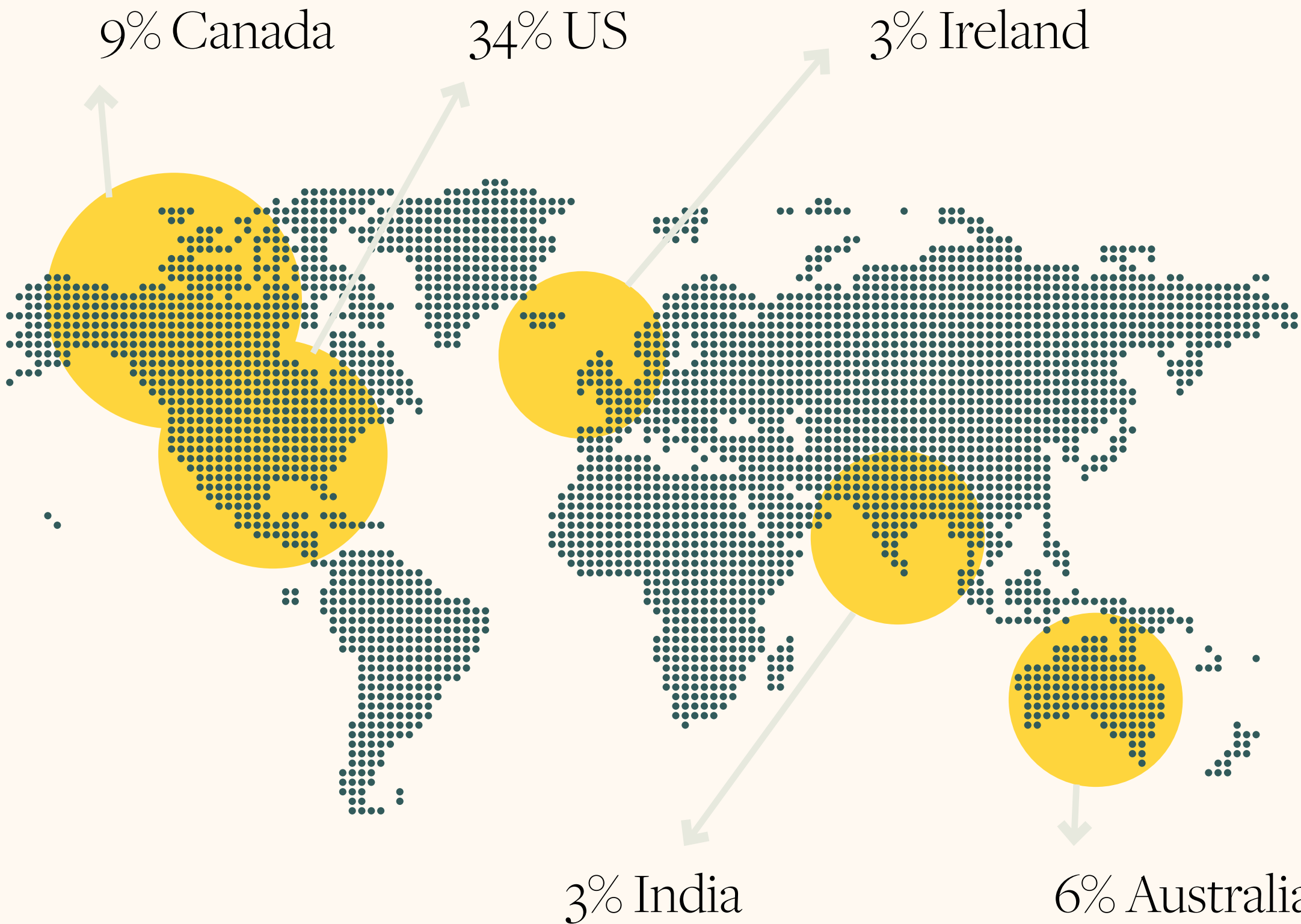
Are transportation enthusiasts

57 %

Are highly engaged in politics

The health professionals also read articles on sport and politics – especially US politics and international relations.

Where do they live?

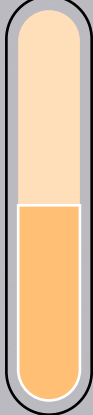




There is a perception among BBC.com audiences that healthcare faces

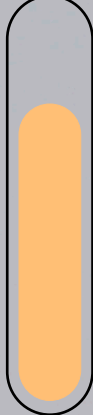
*existential challenges...*

Climate change, affordability and changing demographics are all seen to threaten the future resilience of healthcare.



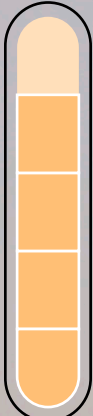
1 in 2

More worried about extreme weather events than they were a year ago (2024)



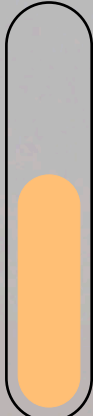
85%

Concerned about the future affordability of healthcare (2023)



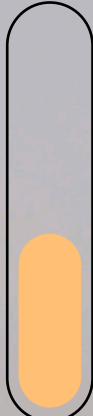
4 in 5

Worried about the impact of ageing populations on healthcare (2023)



65%

More worried about extreme heat than they were a year ago (2024)



40%

Claim their mental health is negatively affected by climate change (2024)

... but trust in health professionals remains high

60%

Believe their needs are met by healthcare professionals

70%

Trust healthcare professionals to provide the best care

Medical doctors (91% agree) and nurses (74% agree) are considered the two most skilled professions



Our Global Minds data

What did we learn about our audiences feelings towards technology?

# *Perceptions are mixed,*

but audiences have faith in the potential  
to help solve healthcare challenges.

Access to newest healthcare technology ranked the lowest in  
a list of factors considered important to healthcare outcomes.

The most important were access to primary healthcare,  
access to affordable care and investment in preventative care.

Audiences are using technology  
to monitor their health and are  
interested to learn more

74%

Have looked up  
symptoms online in  
the last year (2023)

1 in 3

Have used a  
healthcare mobile  
app in the last year

24%

Use wearable  
technology to  
monitor their health

73%

Interested in reading  
about how AI can be  
used for drug discovery

But there are  
privacy concerns

78%

Concerned that  
connected devices  
threaten their privacy

74%

Do not trust tech  
companies to use their  
data responsibly



What *are the*  
experts saying?



We spoke to a range  
of thought leaders in  
healthcare to better  
understand the biggest  
health risks they believe  
we will be facing

in 2025...

A year of growing health inequity

“

**Anil Soni**

CEO, World Health Organization Foundation

The growing health equity  
gap is one of the greatest  
challenges of our time.

Too many marginalised communities are  
left behind and denied the care they need.  
Storytelling is a powerful tool to change this  
reality – it brings voices to the forefront, shifts  
perspectives and drives urgent action. By sharing  
lived experiences, we don't just inform; we  
inspire the policies and investments needed to  
close the gap for good.”





A focus on **women and children's health**



**Kirstie Graham**

Director of capacity building, UICC

Storytelling plays a fundamental role in the work of the Union for International Cancer Control, where we are working to ensure that all those affected by cancer have access to the care they need, and that no one dies from a preventable cancer. Stories convey the true human experience behind the statistics and facts, inspiring solidarity, understanding and hope, and fundamentally, driving action. We need this to help advance progress in addressing women's health, and women's cancers specifically, where there is compelling evidence of the gap and barriers in access to care, as well as solutions and opportunities that could transform lives."



Addressing **workplace wellbeing**



**Howard Catton**

CEO, International Council of Nurses

The World Health Organization reports a nurse shortage currently of 5.8 million and predicts a projected shortfall of 11 million health workers by 2030, leaving many without the care they need. This is especially pertinent when it comes to the nursing sector as nurses comprise the largest percentage of healthcare workers across the globe. Additionally, a recent report released by the International Council of Nurses also warned of a deepening crisis in the wellbeing of the global nursing workforce. This nursing shortage coupled with the concerning trends in workforce sustainability is worrying and we know we must take urgent and decisive action to prioritise nurse wellbeing to advance Universal Health Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. We know that storytelling has a major role to play when it comes to recruiting and retaining talent in the healthcare sector and we know this is more important in 2025 than ever before."



The Insider View





Broadening determinants of health



**Dr Jagat Narula**

World Heart Federation president-elect



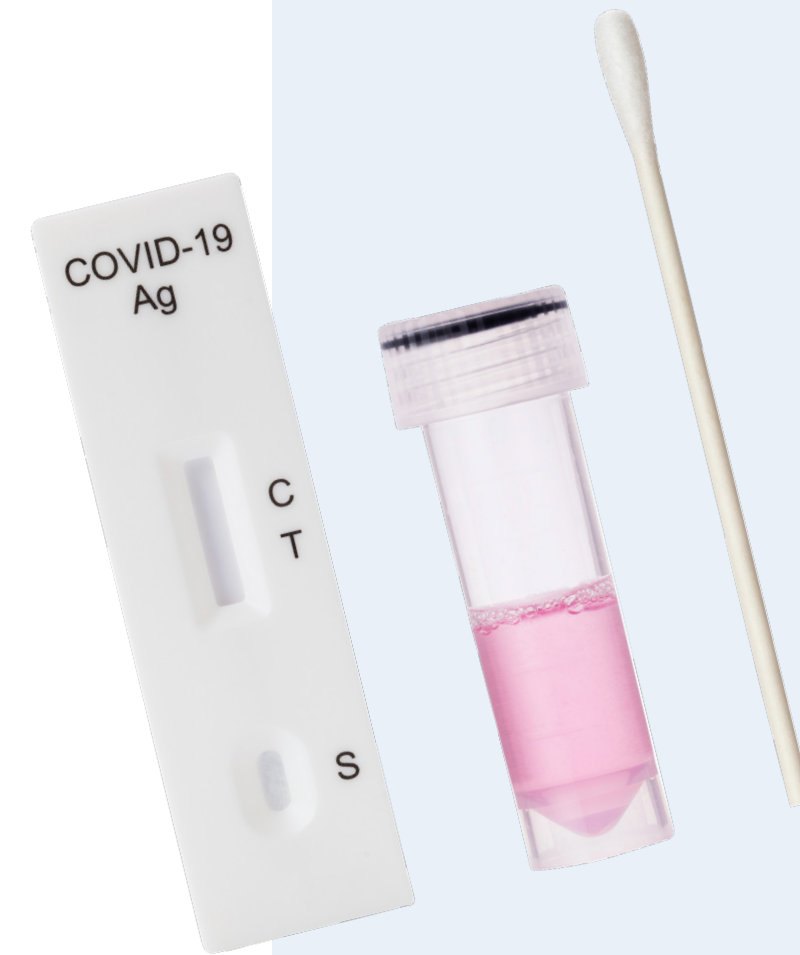
We all agree, 2025 is a critical year for cardiovascular disease in the context of the SDG 3.4 target to reduce non-communicable disease deaths by one-third by 2030. Cardiovascular diseases afflict everyone across all backgrounds equally, yet the burden they impose isn't felt so. Beyond the standard risk factors like high blood pressure, sugar, cholesterol and smoking, a complex mix of risk multipliers, including urbanisation, poor diet, physical inactivity and stress, are driving the rise in cases. Raising awareness and challenging misconceptions is crucial and storytelling could play the most powerful role in shifting perceptions and inspiring action to improve heart health for all."

Rising threat of infectious disease



**Heulwen Philpott**

Head of the International Pandemic Preparedness Secretariat



Five years on from the Covid-19 pandemic, the world remains acutely aware of the devastating impacts infectious diseases can unleash. We know the twelve viral families most likely to trigger another pandemic – yet today, we are fully equipped to respond with approved vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics for only two: Covid-19 and Ebola Zaire. Initiatives like the 100 Days Mission are working to change this, bringing together governments, industry, academia, and civil society to accelerate innovation and ensure that the building blocks of preparedness are in place to enable a rapid response to any kind of infectious disease threat."



# How do *we tell compelling* health stories?





The view from our creative director...

“ In times of uncertainty, people are drawn to content that offers solutions.

“

**Nickie Omer**

Creative director

Programme Partnerships, BBC StoryWorks

In times of uncertainty, people are drawn to content that offers solutions. This is as true in healthcare as it is in any other sector. Branded stories are a fantastic place to showcase what is being done in the health sector away from the headlines.

The best and most uplifting health stories we have produced are told through the lived experience of the contributors, and the passion of people and organisations making a difference. Our producers are skilled at translating the crucial information from complex topics into engaging human-led films. As well as the creative way we craft moving stories, we take pride in our fact checking and the substantiation of all claims made in our content.”





## Storytelling best practice

Our best health-focused stories achieve emotional resonance by centring on patients or practitioners whose personal journeys and passions deeply engage audiences.



Excellent casting

Taking time to cast a good contributor ensures films build stronger audience connection and generate deeper audience engagement.



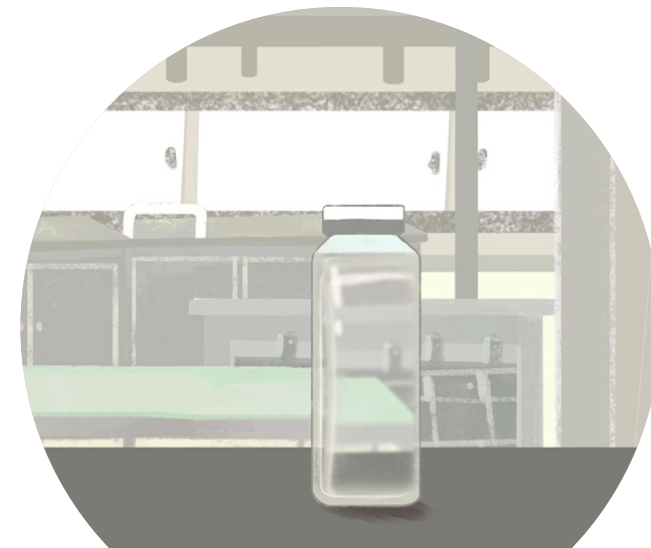
Actuality

Actuality refers to real, unmanipulated footage of events, people or situations filmed as it happens. Films that show actuality are powerful for audiences to see and relate to a health journey.



Solutions focused

Films which are optimistic and seek to leave the viewer with hope for a better tomorrow will be increasingly important.



Analogies

Using metaphors or analogies is an excellent tool to make difficult topics understandable for a general audience, especially poignant for health stories which may feature complex medical or scientific jargon.



Single narrative

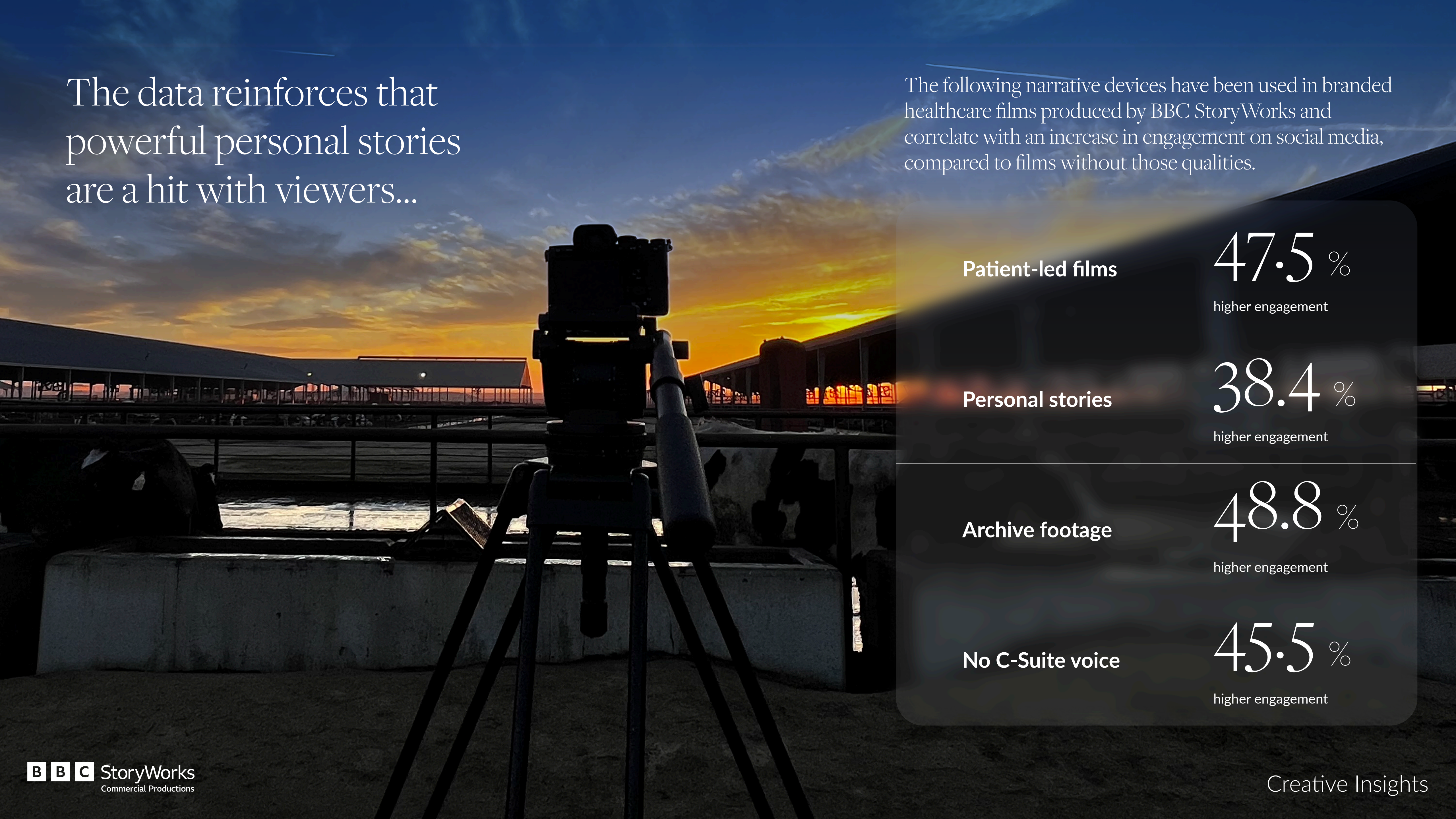
Sometimes less is more and finding one brilliant contributor is a useful narrative tool to build true connection with audiences and feel close to that individual's personal story.



Space to create

Health stories can benefit from allowing extra time in the filming schedule. It is important contributors feel comfortable speaking about personal issues and time to rest between takes may also be needed. Extra time with contributors also means the crew can capture more authentic moments of their daily lives.





The data reinforces that  
powerful personal stories  
are a hit with viewers...

The following narrative devices have been used in branded healthcare films produced by BBC StoryWorks and correlate with an increase in engagement on social media, compared to films without those qualities.

**Patient-led films**

47.5 %

higher engagement

**Personal stories**

38.4 %

higher engagement

**Archive footage**

48.8 %

higher engagement

**No C-Suite voice**

45.5 %

higher engagement

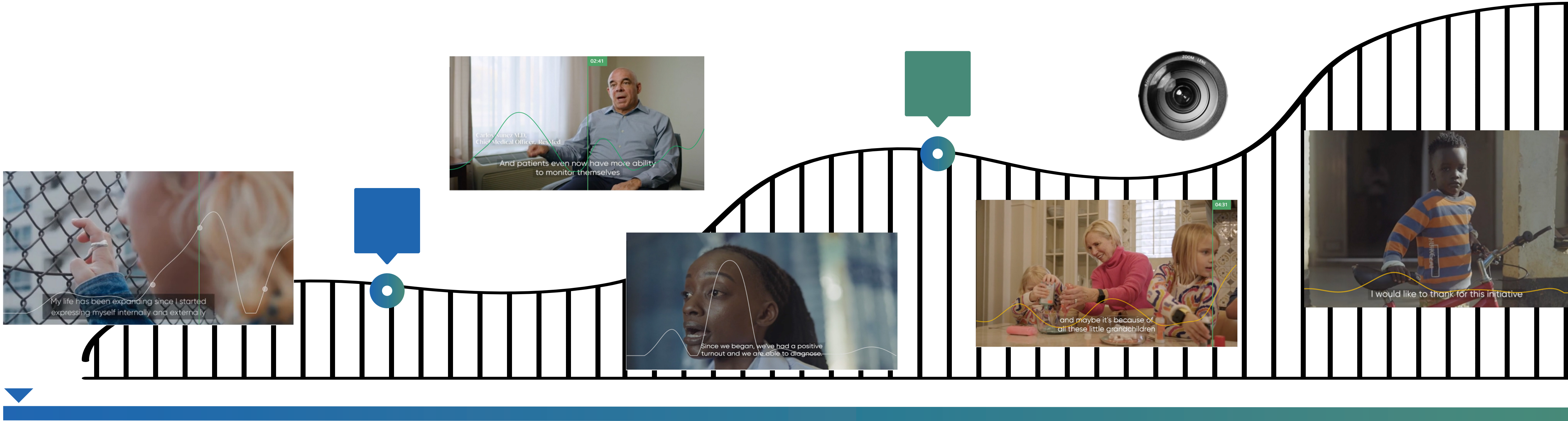


# Science *of* Engagement

In addition to quantitative data sources, qualitative data sources, powered by AI, also point to the power of patient centric stories.

This bespoke research tool uses innovative technology to measure the emotional impact of content produced by BBC StoryWorks.



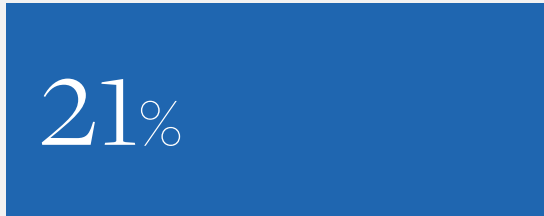


Science of Engagement allows us to measure the emotional impact of content produced by BBC StoryWorks.

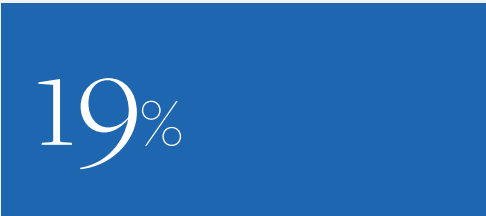
- 01 First we watch a panel of audiences watching our content, using eye tracking and facial coding to see how they react to each moment of our films. This allows us to build an “emotional journey”, tracking the moments in a film where emotional responses spike.
- 02 Then we survey this exposed group of viewers with implicit and explicit questions to see whether the content has influenced their understanding, perception and intention. We ask the same questions of an unexposed group to compare the variation in responses.

### Unexposed vs Exposed

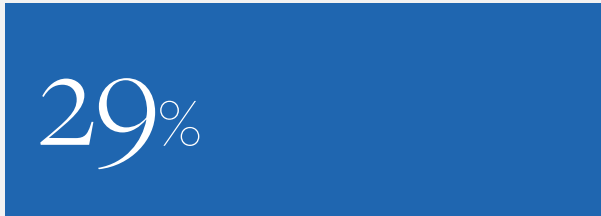
#### Authentic



#### Progressive



#### Compassionate







We ran Science of Engagement on three healthcare films and here is what it told us about storytelling

### Trustworthy messengers...

Across three recent BBC StoryWorks branded films on the topic of health and technology, audience engagement spiked when medical professionals appeared on screen.

### ... and a powerful, positive journey...

Each film also had a major spike in audience response towards the end, as the personal stories of protagonist patients were left on an upbeat, optimistic note.

### ... deliver powerful results

The three films, displaying both components, all comfortably outperformed BBC StoryWorks benchmarks from 100+ Science of Engagement studies run to date.



In general, films without proper attention to location, actuality and sound, can feel flat as they fail to activate the crucial human senses of *sight* and *sound* – things that help us connect.

As the creative director of BBC StoryWorks Programme Partnerships, what advice would you offer to someone crafting a healthcare story today?

“

**Nickie Omer**

Creative director

Programme Partnerships, BBC StoryWorks

**It's all about connection**

Begin with the question, “What would make me want to watch this?” We are all connoisseurs of content. Trust your instinct. What do you find interesting about the story? How would you tell this story to a friend in an engaging way?

**Get personal**

Move health stories out of clinical settings and into communities and homes. Stories are relatable when told through human experience. This approach relies on strong contributors, so the right casting is crucial. Find someone who can demonstrate impact through their own story – a patient or a passionate practitioner.

**Pictures and sequences**

Consider how to bring unique settings and locations into the film. Film actuality and your contributors interacting their environments in a way that is meaningful to the story.

**Keep it simple**

Avoid too many messages or overly technical information. In a film context, even the worthiest health story will fail to engage if it is too technical or contains too many messages for a viewer to take in. Consider a written or graphical accompaniment to the film if you want to include more detail.





Get in touch to take  
your story further with  
BBC StoryWorks

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