



## A guide to developing an effective GP Practice Patient Group

### What is a GP Practice Patient (Participation) Group (PPG)?

A PPG is a group or network of registered patient volunteers that work in partnership with GP practice staff, including GPs, to help improve practice services.

The group can meet, for face to face discussions with practice staff, or be part of a virtual network with ongoing two-way communication through email, online surveys and social media but their aim is to influence the way that services are offered from their GP Practice.

Many groups also support the practice by arranging health information and well-being sessions, helping with surveys and fundraising. These activities are dependent on the make-up of the group but should not detract from the primary aim to improve services.

### Why?

From April 2015 it is a contractual requirement for all practices to have a PPG and to make reasonable efforts for it to be representative of the practice population. The practice needs to engage with the PPG, obtain patient feedback and work together to act on and develop suggestions for improvement. Carers of registered patients may also be involved in the PPG.

#### A PPG:

- Gives patients and practice staff the opportunity to discuss topics of mutual interest
- Provides a means for patients to become more involved in and influence the services they receive
- Brings a patient perspective when exploring issues from complaints and surveys and subsequent action plans
- Can support health awareness, patient education and patient communication

#### A PPG is not

- A forum for individual complaints (needs clear ground rules)
- A practice fan club (need to be able to challenge as a 'critical friend')
- Time consuming for practice staff (although some effort will be required to get a PPG developed – activities they undertaken will often save practice time)
- An opportunity for medical advice – these need to be accessed through established practice procedures.

## What are the benefits of a PPG?

### For Practices

- Assistance to continuously improve services and plan with patients
- Developing networks outside of the practice, bringing practices closer to the community they service
- Use resources more efficiently
- Provide a link between the practice and their patients
- Practical support and assistance to implement change
- Helps reduce formal complaints
- Meets contractual requirement

### For Patients

- Opportunity to influence services
- Patients benefit from improved communications with staff
- Better knowledge of and understanding of the practice
- Services reflecting views of patient population
- Patients are engaged with any proposed changes before decisions are made

## What can a PPG do?

PPGs can be part of a number of activities, working in partnership with the practice and using the interests, experience and time of the patients and carers involved. It is important to be clear about aims and expectations with clear communication between both patient members and the practice. This way, patients can make an informed decision on whether they wish to be involved and at what level / time commitment.

It is likely that those involved in a virtual group will want to get less involved in arranging activities and attending meetings and more interested in online communication – giving feedback and completing surveys.

Activity	Actual	Virtual
Developing a practice patient survey	Y	Y
Providing a network to distribute survey	Y	Y
Giving feedback / experience on specific issues	Y	Y
Meeting with practice to discuss actions / plans as a result of survey	Y	N
Network to feedback actions / plans as a result of meeting with patients	Y	Y
Providing regular face to face opportunity for practice and patients to discuss developments, plans and issues	Y	N
Opportunity to engage with a more diverse mix of patients		Y
Arranging health information sessions	Y	N

## Membership - Recruitment

There are numerous ways of recruiting patients to an actual or virtual group, depending on interest levels:

- **Information:**
  - Flyers, screens, newsletters, practice information leaflets
  - Website, social media



- Articles in local residents / schools / community newsletters
- Email direct to registered patients
- Advertising through local businesses
- Word of mouth:
  - Through practice staff
  - Practice 'open day'
  - Using / attending local community groups to share information
  - Service or condition related information meetings
  - Flu vaccination clinics
- Patients:
  - Recruiting patients who have made constructive complaints in the past or those that use particular services

### Membership - Representation

It is challenging but also very important to try and make the PPG as representative of the practice population as possible.

- Practice demographics can be accessed through the Informatics Team at Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) **contact details**
- Targeting those 'harder to reach' groups

### Engaging with 'harder to reach groups'

We know that more traditional engagement methods, such as meetings, are often not accessible and of limited interest to some people and that particular care needs to be taken to help facilitate engagement.

A 'harder to reach' group is an individual or section of the community who is more difficult to engage with because of physical inaccessibility, language, cultural perceptions and traditions or social expectations. These may include asylum seekers, children and young people, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender people, homeless, minority ethnic communities, (ex) offenders, people with disabilities, commuters, single parents.



Often people will not want to attend meetings, or take part in surveys but can often be engaged if they have a particular interest for example in a long term condition or service. Contact may also be made through local community groups.

### Enabling harder to reach groups to participate

Once you have identified and accessed your harder to reach groups it will be necessary to help overcome those barriers to engagement so may involve using interpreters, visual aids, providing alternative care and being flexible over timing of any meetings.

### Face to face meetings

Actual meetings are useful. They can be used for discussions on important issues and can bring a group of people together as a 'planning group' to take activities forward as agreed with the practice. This is likely to be a small group of people who have the time and interest to be more actively involved in what the PPG does.

**Tips for effective meetings**

- The first meeting will be used to decide whether people wish to be involved.
- Invitations to the meeting can be given out by practice staff
- Practice staff (particularly GPs) need to support the meetings, demonstrating their commitment to the group
- Agree the aims of the PPG and how communication is going to work across the group, practice and virtual members
- Keep meetings short, focussed and an opportunity for ongoing dialogue – feeding back on actions and discussions
- The group should decide if they want to have a patient chair and identify someone to take notes of meetings, this may well be undertaken by a member of the practice and can be just action points.

**West Herts PPG Network**

In the Herts Valleys area there is a PPG Network which was set up to provide an opportunity for representatives from practice patient groups to:

- Share good practice.
- Support and encourage the development of an active practice patient group in every GP practice in West Herts.
- Be a conduit for communicating with individual practice patient groups.
- To encourage each practice patient group to have a representative at their locality patient group.

There is a meeting every four months with the agenda being set by network members.

**Checklist / Level rating**

Activity	One Star	Two Stars	Three Stars