

Patient Participation Groups: A Best Practice Guide



Best Practice Guide Introduction

A Patient Participation Group (PPG) is a group of patients, carers and GP practice staff who meet to discuss practice issues and patient experience to help improve the service.

Since April 2015, it has been a contractual requirement of NHS England for all GP practices to have a PPG and to make reasonable efforts for this to be representative of the practice population.

This Best Practice Guide has been designed to assist GP practices and patients in setting up and maintaining a PPG to improve services for the whole of their GP practice population.

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For support with your Patient Participation Group and/or further information and queries please contact:

Healthwatch Central West London

Unit 25/26 Shaftesbury Centre, 85 Barlby Road, London W10 6BN

0208 968 7049

healthwatchcwl@hestia.org

What is a Patient Participation Group (PPG)?

Patient Participation Group Definition

A Patient Participation Group (PPG) is a group of patients, carers and GP practice staff who meet to discuss practice issues and patient experience to improve the service.

Purpose of a PPG:

- To give patients and practice staff the opportunity to meet and discuss topics of mutual interest.
- To provide a means for patients to become more involved and make suggestions about the healthcare services they receive.
- To explore issues from patient complaints and patient surveys, contribute to actions plans and help monitor improvements.
- To contribute feedback to the practice on National Patient Survey results and Friends and Family Test feedback to propose developments or change.
- To support health awareness and patient education.

What should a PPG look like?

A PPG is open to every patient on the GP practice list. All communities, groups, genders, ages, ethnicities, and disabilities representing the patient list are encouraged to join. There are no other membership requirements except that patients must be registered with the practice.



PPG members should as far as possible, be representative of the practice population. In some cases, the practice can ask for support from their local Healthwatch to assist in the recruitment of patients.

What types of PPGs are there and how should they work?

Face to Face	Virtual
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Practices setting up a face to face group should try to make the group as representative as possible.● The practice staff should make sure that everyone in the group is clear about what is and what is not to be included in group discussions or actions.● It is good to outline some ground rules during the first meeting of the group, for the PPG to return to when needed. This will form part of the Terms of Reference (See appendix 3).● Poor planning is one of the main reasons why patient groups fail, so it is important that the group formulates an action plan. These can include short term, and long term goals, with timescales for when tasks need to be completed.● Meetings should be set for no longer than 1.5 hours, unless PPG members have specifically requested more time.● A PPG should aim to meet at least 4 times over a year (quarterly) but can meet more often if the group chooses to do so. Usually, a PPG will meet within the GP practice at a time suitable for all patients - this could be afternoon or evening depending on your practice population.● A PPG should always block out time during these meetings for the practice to give patients any information about changes to the practice's services, and for patients to bring up any issues they feel could affect the wider practice population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Practices can set up a virtual group for patients who want to contribute to improving services in the practice, but cannot attend face to face meetings. In this case, the practice can run the group in a number of different ways.● Set up an email address specifically for PPG members, which is used to communicate with patients and consult with them on a range of topics that affect the practice.● Use social media to communicate with a wider range of patients.● Set up a Skype account for virtual face to face meetings.● Designated staff responsible for communicating with the virtual PPG should ensure they have regular communication with the group, keeping them updated with any changes happening in the practice.● Members should be asked regularly to provide comments and suggestions over email, just as they would in a face to face group.● If virtual members decide they want a face to face group, this can be made possible by the practice. They might meet less frequently than other face to face groups, as these meetings would be in addition to the virtual group.

PPG Do's and Don'ts

What can a PPG do?

- Discuss constructive suggestions for improving the practice, and share concerns that could affect the wider practice population.
- Organise health focused events with the practice, i.e. healthy eating awareness as an information event for all practice patients to attend.
- Create a patient survey with practice staff, to get feedback about the practice from the rest of the patient population.
- Design a newsletter for the practice, to provide regular updates to patients.
- Assist the practice in making sure their website is 'Patient Friendly'.
- Engage with the local community via fundraising events and useful health information, to ensure the PPG is representative.
- Invite health and voluntary professionals to PPG meetings, for PPG members to remain informed and updated about local opportunities for patients.

What can a PPG not do?

- PPG patient members cannot provide any medical advice to other patients, or deal with personal/medical issues or individual patient complaints during the meeting. These should be dealt with outside the meeting following the practices already established procedures.

PPG Best Practice Example:

A PPG member at X Medical Centre wanted to raise a formal complaint during the meeting about not getting a prescription from a GP. The chair of the meeting suggested the patient speak with the Practice Manager after the meeting to resolve the issue.



First Steps for Setting up a PPG

Starting a PPG for the first time can seem like a daunting experience.

It is important that a PPG is meaningful to both the patients and the practice staff, and there are various ways to work towards this that are specific to each PPG.

In this section you will find some basic **Ground Rules** that can be used for a first PPG meeting, and a clear outline of the **Roles and Responsibilities** of a PPG.

Ground Rules	
The PPG meeting is not a forum for individual complaints and personal issues.	Silence indicates agreement - speak up if you would like your suggestions to be a part of the discussion!
Open and honest communication applies to all.	All views are valid and will be listened to.
Be flexible, listen, ask for help and support each other.	No phones or other disruptions.
Respect the practice and patient confidentiality at all times.	Discrimination on any grounds will not be tolerated.
Demonstrate a commitment to delivering results as a group.	Start and finish meetings on time and stick to the agenda.

Roles and Responsibilities of a PPG:

The PPG might in the first instance, consist of between 3 and 10 patients. There will also be representation from the practice either via the Practice Manager or a delegated member of admin staff who is always in attendance. GPs should also attend the meetings, either for a regular slot on the agenda, or as and when requested by PPG members. The PPG should meet at least 4 times a year.

PPG members should elect a **Patient Chair** after the first or second meeting. Having a patient who chairs the PPG meetings empowers the group to share their views and encourages co-production between the patients and the practice.

Patient Chair: Manages meetings and is the main link between the patient group and the practice staff.

The **Patient Chair** should:

- Set the agenda of the meeting **with** practice staff.
- Ensure all PPG members have equal opportunity to contribute to the meeting.
- Ensure all agenda items are discussed in a timely manner.
- Ensure actions are recorded and steps are taken to implement them.

The PPG should also have a **Secretary** (this might be a patient or a member of practice staff) to take the notes of the meeting, as this will help structure the PPG meetings and its activities. This role could rotate amongst the PPG members.

Secretary: Is responsible for supporting the chair and ensuring the group runs smoothly.

The **Secretary** should:

- Take notes at the meeting and circulate them. They should include all action points agreed at the meeting.
- The notes should be shared using the agreed method of communication for PPG Members; e.g. over email or via post.

PPG Best Practice Example:

After putting up PPG posters and flyers and speaking to a number of interested patients, X Medical Centre had their first PPG meeting and 6 patients attended, along with the Practice Manager and a GP. The group elected a patient chair and discussed the practice's new website. PPG members suggested creating a short survey to share with the whole practice population to find out if they are accessing the new practice website, and if they find it easy to navigate.



Recruiting More Patients to Your PPG

There are lots of ways to recruit PPG members, and the most effective ways depend on the nature of your practice population:

- Create a large poster advertising the PPG, which has a small amount of text and says clearly what the group is, when they meet and how to register.
- Use the electronic display to advertise the PPG if you have one.
- Practice staff can help identify patients who might be interested, and approach them face to face to tell them about the group.
- If you already have PPG members, some may be willing to spend an afternoon sitting in the practice, talking to patients in the waiting room and signing them up there and then.
- Create a PPG page for the practice website.
- Advertise the PPG at local community hub spaces with posters.
- Have an open day with useful information on particular health topics for all interested patients to attend.
- Tell patients about the group as soon as they register with the practice and when they pick up repeat prescriptions.
- Advertise the PPG using the text message service.
- Make contact with your local Healthwatch to assist in telling people about your PPG.

How to make your PPG more representative:

Having a PPG that represents the diversity of your patient population is important in making sure the GP practice is meeting the needs of its patients, by listening to a variety of patient voices.

There are many things PPGs can do to engage a wider range of patients:

- Create a Suggestions and Compliments Box that sits in the GP practice.
- Advertise the PPG amongst local community groups with the support of local voluntary organisations like Healthwatch.
- PPG members can attend local community group meetings.
- Invite local voluntary organisation representatives to PPG meetings, to share PPG information with the people they work with.
- Practice/PPG members can go out into the community to consult with particular seldom-heard groups.
- Practice can host information sessions/events that are relevant to particular community groups to reign in interest.
- GP Practices can engage with Healthwatch and receive feedback from seldom-heard groups about their GP practice, to take to future PPG meetings.

PPG Best Practice Example:

X Medical Centre designed posters with their PPG as well as a newsletter, indicating that they would like more PPG members. After reviewing their records, the practice realised they had a number of patients with diabetes that they were not getting feedback from, so they hosted a Diabetes Information Day in their practice. They invited interested patients to attend, sign up to the PPG, and chat with existing PPG members about what it's like to be a part of a PPG.



Extra Support for Your PPG

There are lots of resources available to support PPGs, their members, and the GP Practices they belong to. For a PPG to succeed, it is important that members are supported. Patients must feel they can contribute in a meaningful way otherwise they may not want to continue attending PPG meetings.

Shared learning and good practice

Successful PPGs can nominate a member to attend other newly formed PPG meetings to speak to patients about PPGs, how they run their own PPG, and what challenges they have faced that others can learn from.

Nominated PPG members can also attend PPG Area meetings if they are run locally, to represent their GP practice and learn from the experiences of other PPGs.

Training

Healthwatch and some Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) provide free training sessions for patients and practice staff about engagement and being a patient representative. Contact your local Healthwatch (www.healthwatchcwl.co.uk) or your local CCG to find out what training sessions are available for patients and staff to attend.

If GP Practice staff do attend patient engagement training, it is important to remember that when reporting back to PPG meetings, the use of jargon language is avoided, and any materials provided are in an accessible format (i.e. using large text and easy-read documents with pictures).

Healthwatch Central West London (CWL) PPG Project Work

Healthwatch CWL has been doing a lot of work with PPGs in West London for the last few years, and has produced a number of communication materials and PPG reports. Visit <http://goo.gl/eoRNRL> on the Healthwatch CWL website to download some of the materials.

National Association for Patient Participation (NAPP)

NAPP provides a number of PPG resources and information to support the development of PPGs, as well as ideas for meeting topics. Practice PPGs can choose to become members of NAPP by paying a joining fee and receiving a number of regular benefits and resources. Visit www.napp.org.uk for more information.

PPG Best Practice Example:

X Medical Centre kept close communication with Healthwatch PPG Project work, and sent their PPG Patient Chair to a PPG Network meeting. At the meeting, the Chair found out about other ways to be a patient representative including being involved in making sure new NHS services meet the needs of the populations they served, and shared this with their fellow PPG members.

PPG Best Practice Example:

X Medical Centre was visited by a neighbouring practice's PPG Patient Chair, who shared recent topics from their PPG and ideas for getting more PPG members.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Do we have to have a patient group?

Yes, since April 2015, all GP Practice NHS core contracts require GPs to have a PPG and make reasonable efforts to ensure that it is representative.

This is part of the government's aim to put the patient at the heart of everything the NHS does.

Should Practice Staff be involved in the Group?

Yes, a GP and Practice Manager or equivalent should be part of the group. Without the support of both a clinician and a manager, the patient group will be unable to function effectively. The group must be supported with practice information, resources and authority to take action.

Let the group know who will be the lead from the practice and which GPs will be involved.

How many patients should be in the patient group?

There is no fixed number for a patient group, but it is best to start with a core group of 4-6 members who are able to commit and participate.

If the practice is set up for it, there can be additional virtual members who participate through the website.

A greater number of patients can also be invited to hear the results of the patient survey or for other special events arranged by the practice.

How often should the patient group meet?

- **Frequency:** There is no fixed number of required meetings, but a quarterly meeting (every 3 months) is what practices should aim for.
- **When:** Getting the time right is vital. Timing depends on the preference of PPG members if you already have them signed up, and the nature of your practice population. If you have a majority

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working age population, evenings might be best. And if you have an older, retired population, meetings in the daytime might suit your PPG better. However, this depends almost entirely on the preference of your patients. Practices that have a mixture of the two can also have their meetings on rotation at different times/days.

- **Length:** Meetings should be long enough to discuss the relevant topics, but not too long that people switch off during meetings. One hour and thirty minutes is the maximum recommended time.
- **Venue:** The meeting room is to be supplied by the practice; usually the practice itself is the best place to hold meetings as patients will be familiar with the premises. If this is not possible for any reason, the practice may consider a local, accessible community venue.

What do patients get out of having a patient group?

- The opportunity to be more involved with the practice.
- A chance to make suggestions and improve the practice.
- A means of ensuring that complaints are taken on board and necessary changes are being made.
- A way of finding out more about healthcare provisions in the local area.
- Making a contribution to the NHS and the wider community.
- Greater confidence by becoming a patient representative, having their voice heard and witnessing change happen when working as a part of a group.
- An opportunity to learn more about the NHS, GP Practices, and other ways to use their skills as a patient representative.

What does the practice get out of having a patient group?

- Understanding their patient experiences and views, thus contributing to more satisfied patients and better run services.
- A patient group suggesting simple solutions that may not have been explored before.
- PPGs can encourage health education activities amongst patients.
- A successful PPG can drive in additional income; this can contribute to developing services that will benefit patients and help to maintain the PPG itself.

Example of a PPG Activity Timeline



Example of PPG Terms of Reference

(Source: Victoria Medical Centre - <http://goo.gl/PRgk3y>)

The success of a PPG depends on the clarity of its purpose; it is useful to agree the Terms of Reference for the group.

Name of Practice Patient Participation Group (PPG) Terms of Reference

Aim of the group

To represent the patients of **Name of Practice** and work in partnership with GPs and practice staff to improve services for patients

Membership

- The PPG is open to any patient registered with the practice
- It should be reflective of the patient demographic of the practice
- The maximum number of patients in the group is **X**
- The PPG will elect a Chair to run meetings and guide work of the group.

Objectives

In partnership with the practice, the PPG aims to:

- To act as an advisory group providing perspectives and concerns from patients that can influence how services operate at the practice
- To communicate to the practice areas of patient concern with a view to influencing change
- To act as a consultative group for any changes at the practice
- To encourage and support the role of the practice in involving patients in their own care
- To monitor complaints and comments received about the practice
- To annually review the results of the patient survey and suggest changes as appropriate.

Meetings

- The PPG will meet at least 4 times a year and these meeting dates will be set in advance

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- Members will send apologies in advance of the meeting if they are unable to attend
- Practice staff will send apologies in advance of the meeting if they are unable to attend allowing enough time for the meeting to be rescheduled if deemed necessary
- A Practice GP, or deputy and whenever possible the Practice Manager will attend all PPG meetings to present news of developments within the practice and to respond to issues raised by the PPG
- At the discretion of the Chair the GP can be requested to attend part or all of the meeting. Other staff of the **Name of Practice** or other parties from outside the Practice may also attend by invitation.
- Copies of the minutes of meetings will be prepared by or sent to the Practice Manager for distribution to the practice staff and to be made available to patients on notice boards and through other communication means deemed to be appropriate.

Dissolution

- If the PPG considers it appropriate to dissolve, patients will be notified of the proposal, in writing, such notice to be displayed in the waiting room. Full explanation will be given as to the reasons for the dissolution and patients will be invited to the next available meeting where the proposal may be upheld or suspended.
- Notice should be given at least one month before the proposed final meeting of the PPG. Reasons for the dissolution or other action to be duly recorded in the minutes and published.

Name of Practice Commitment

- The Practice manager or delegated Practice Staff member will attend all meetings
- **Name of Practice** will commit to attending meetings of PPG, taking forward issues and recommendations from the PPG and supplying responses of action taken as a result and will be party to decisions taken by the PPG.
- **Name of Practice** will keep PPG informed of service developments and bring them for discussion at PPG meetings, including how wider practice population can get involved in these discussions.

Example of PPG Constitution

The group shall be known as, membership will be open to any patient registered with the practice and will include the practice manager or other practice team members as representation from the practice. Membership will be via the meeting group or the virtual group.

Aims

- The group will provide a communication channel between the patients and the practice.
- With the help and assistance of practice, the group will seek suggestions from patients for improvements to the service and highlight any areas that need attention.
- The group will assist the practice in monitoring quality through patient participation.

Objectives

- **Communication:** The group will influence the development of policies in the practice by representing patient views. This will ensure patients make the best use of the facilities available.
- **Surveys:** The group will conduct surveys with patients to inform the action plan.
- The group will work with the practice to ensure changes are fed down to local community groups.
- The group will be informed of the commissioning plans and policies of the CCG and engaged in consultations when required.
- Information will be given to patients through poster displays and the practice newsletter (if practice has one).

Rules Governing the Group

- The group shall elect a chair to serve for a period of two years and will be elected at a PPG meeting. Meeting at the practice will be held quarterly.
- The group will consist of at least a core group of 4 patients.
- A copy of the minutes from the PPG meeting will be sent out to members via the Secretary and are also available on request or on the practice website.

Example of First PPG Meeting Agenda

- 1. Welcome and Introductions**
- 2. Ground Rules**
- 3. Aims and objectives of the PPG**
- 4. Update from the GP Practice**
- 5. Suggestions and Comments from PPG Patient Members**
- 6. Election of Chair and Secretary**
- 7. Action Plan for Next Meeting**
- 8. AOB**

Glossary

PPG - Patient Participation Groups

GP - General Practitioner (Doctor)

CCG - Clinical Commissioning Group who buys services in the local area, and is made up of GPs and NHS Professionals.

PPG Area Meetings - 6 monthly meetings usually run by Healthwatch, where PPG Patient Chairs and representatives are invited to share learning and best practice from their groups.

NAPP - National Association for Patient Participation

Local Healthwatch - An independent charity and membership organisation working to ensure the patient voice counts when it comes to shaping and improving local health and care services.