



Londonwide LMCs

The professional voice of London general practice

Widening participation in your Patient Participation Group, including building a virtual Patient Participation Group

Guidance for practice teams and their Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) to benefit practices and patients

August 2017

Introduction

Londonwide LMCs' Patient Engagement Project (PEP) aims to promote patient engagement as integral to high quality, sustainable general practice and provide practical support to London practices to foster and develop their Patient Participation Groups (PPGs).

This guidance has been produced by the project for practices and patients who want to widen participation in their PPGs. It aims to help support practice team leads in patient participation and the chairs of their PPGs in working together to engage more members of their diverse practice patient population in their PPG.

The guidance is informed by learning shared with the project over the year July 2016/2017 by London practice leads in patient participation and their PPG members on what's worked for them in increasing the number and diversity of patients participating in their PPG.

What this guidance covers

This guidance summarises how widening participation in your PPG can benefit your practice and patients. It gives practical pointers on ways to widen participation in your PPG and some examples of how London PPGs and practice teams have together enabled more, and more diverse, members of their patient populations to get involved in their PPG. It includes a brief section on developing a virtual PPG.

The guidance signposts throughout relevant, practical and freely available online information and resources.

1. How widening participation in your PPG can benefit your patients and practice

Widening participation in your PPG can develop your PPG's ability to improve services to your diverse practice patient population and contribute to practice sustainability by helping you to:

Meet contractual requirements

Since April 2015 it has been a contractual requirement for all practices to:

- develop and maintain a PPG for the practice to obtain feedback from the practice population on services delivered by the contractor
- make reasonable efforts for the PPG to be representative of the practice patient population
- engage with the PPG in a frequency and manner agreed with the group

Please see page 23 of the [2015/16 General Medical Services \(GMS\) contract](#).

Increase the effectiveness of your PPG

The key characteristics of PPGs that are effective in improving services to patients and supporting practice sustainability include:

- shared patient and practice clarity about the role and purpose of the PPG
- diversity of PPG membership
- a culture of open, honest and collaborative working between the practice team and PPG
- clear goals and an action plan to achieve them
- a variety of opportunities for patients to get involved

(eg, both face to face and virtual opportunities to participate).

Reference: Key characteristics of effective PPGs are illustrated by the report of the PEP Roundtable event which is [available here](#).

Achieve positive results for your practice and for your patient population

An effective PPG that reaches and involves diverse members of your practice patient population will be an invaluable, practical resource, which can:

- act as a critical friend to the practice, feeding back on patient experience and needs from across your local community
- inform practice decision making to tailor and target high quality services to meet the diverse needs of your practice patient population, and help your practice address health inequality
- improve patient access to information about the services your practice offers, and the services offered by other local health, social care and third sector organisations
- inform the wider practice patient population about the challenges facing general practice in London and engage them in helping to meet those challenges

Useful resources:

- National Association for Patient Participation <http://www.napp.org.uk>
- The Patients Association <http://www.patients-association.org.uk>

2. Acting to widen participation in your PPG

Every practice and PPG is different, as are the diverse local patient populations they exist to serve and represent. Your PPG's priorities will be specific to your patients and practice.

Outlined below are practical pointers to help you succeed in increasing the number and diversity of patients involved in your PPG.

Have an overview of what works in participation, and apply it when working to widen participation in your PPG

There are various theories and models of service user, patient and public participation. It's useful to know and apply some basic principles of good practice when planning and acting to widen participation in your PPG:

- only ask people to participate if you're able, and prepared, to take their views into account
- be clear about who you are asking to participate and why you are asking them to participate so that you can tailor and publicise participation opportunities widely and appropriately (eg, if you want to encourage young working people to participate in PPG meetings then hold them outside of working hours and/or offer online opportunities to get involved with the PPG)
- offer more than one option for participation (eg, both virtual and face to face options)
- if you're not sure about the most appropriate way to engage people (eg, people with a specific health condition or people identifying as belonging to a particular community) then ask them what would work best for them
- make it enjoyable to participate (eg, offer refreshments at face to face meetings; provide space and time for people to chat to and learn from each other; use informal as well as formal formats to elicit people's views on line and face to face; use accessible language; provide translators and/or advocacy support if required)
- demonstrate that participants' views and experience are valued (eg, listen to and acknowledge diverse points of view; give professional and patient views equal respect and weight)
- communicate and celebrate the positive outcomes of participation, whether big or small (that will help encourage more people to participate in future)
- feedback to participants and to the wider community on what difference participation has made (eg, to your patients, to your practice) so that people can see that their participation is meaningful

Useful resource: "Working Together: An essential guide for healthcare practitioners, researchers, educators and regulators looking to work with service users, patients, carers and members of the public" developed by CAMERA with Plymouth University in partnership with The Patients

Ensure that your practice and patients are clear about the role and purpose of your PPG and communicate that consistently in a variety of ways

Shared clarity between practice and patients about the role and purpose of your PPG is a pre-requisite to widening participation in your PPG.

A consistent, clear and regularly updated script on what the PPG does and is aiming to do, how it can benefit practice and patients and how patients can find out more and get involved will enable both current PPG members and members of the practice team to confidently promote PPG membership in writing, in person, on and off line, and encourage new people to get involved.

Useful resource: Please see the Londonwide LMCs and the Patients Association toolkit "Setting the future framework for your PPG". [Download here.](#)

Use your awareness of the demography of your practice patient population to help you target and promote the benefits of PPG membership

Shared awareness between your practice team and current PPG members of the demography of your practice population will help you to identify the "gaps" in your current PPG membership.

This will inform your planning on how to encourage more members of your diverse patient population to get involved and help you target your PPG communications and engagement opportunities appropriately for different communities.

Useful to know: Public Health England, National General Practice Profiles. The website includes access to individual practice profiles and summary profiles for Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). [Download here.](#)

Be willing to do things differently

The more options there are to get involved with your PPG the more opportunities there are for people from your diverse patient population to be able to, and want to, get involved.

Below are some examples of the successful PPG models used by practices and PPGs who have engaged with Londonwide LMCs' Patient Engagement Project (PEP):

- PPG face to face meetings held at the practice at different times and on different days eg, every other meeting held on a Saturday
- PPG face to face meetings informed by a larger and more diverse virtual PPG membership
- An entirely virtual PPG, using an online platform that enables members to discuss and agree action together
- PPG face to face meetings hosted at different community venues, eg, meetings held at the local YMCA
- PPG offers engagement opportunities to members on different issues in time limited ways, eg, face to face or online focus groups; task and finish groups

Take and make opportunities within your practice to widen your PPG membership

Consider undertaking a basic interests and contacts mapping exercise with your current PPG and practice team members, You may be overlooking talents and connections that represent opportunities to reach and engage more, and more diverse, members of your patient population in your PPG.

Use existing opportunities within your practice to inform patients about the role of your PPG and opportunities for them to get involved. Consider planning and organising new opportunities to attract patients into your practice to find out more about the PPG and at the same time learn more about services offered by and beyond the practice.

Here are some examples of the initiatives taken by practices and PPGs who have engaged with Londonwide LMCs' Patient Engagement Project:

- flyers handed to individual patients by reception staff
- posters in the waiting room
- online information (practice website; Facebook)
- offering information on, and an opportunity to join, the PPG as part of the process of registering with the practice
- a staffed PPG member desk in the waiting room
- offering opportunities to engage with the PPG on days when particular clinics are taking place (eg, mother and baby clinics)
- organising practice open days when the PPG is promoted as an integral part of the day, eg, health promotion days; days focusing on a specific health condition and involving third sector support organisations of, or working with, people living with those conditions; community information days involving local organisations of, or working for, specific communities of interest

Take and make opportunities beyond your practice to widen PPG membership

There are resources, networks and organisations in your local community to help you promote PPG membership appropriately to the diverse people, and groups, that make up your local patient population, and with whom you can share learning about what works and how to overcome barriers to participation.

Identify local organisations of, or working for, particular groups of people who are currently underrepresented in your PPG. Ask them how best to communicate with and involve them in your PPG.

Ask local community organisations and organisations working with particular communities of interest if they will promote your PPG on their websites or in their newsletters. Give examples of what your PPG has achieved for patients and practice and explain what opportunities there are to get involved. Use plain English; translate information into languages other than English as appropriate (and remember that is likely to mean you need to have translations and/or translators available for all engagement opportunities, face to face or online)

If you have a local PPG network join it so that you can share information and learning on widening participation in PPGs. Consider initiating partnership work with the PPGs of other local practices, eg, co-organising an event or open day; visiting a local community group to ask them about their experience of using your practice; together writing a news piece for local publications on what local PPGs do and have achieved; what they want to achieve and how to get involved in setting and delivering PPG priorities.

Here are some examples of the initiatives taken by practices and PPGs who have engaged with Londonwide LMCs' Patient Engagement Project (PEP):

- entering into partnership with a local college, encouraging and supporting students to join, promote and support their PPG as part of their educational and personal development
- attending meetings of a local Somali womens' group to hear group members' views and experiences of using their practice and to share information about the services offered by the practice
- starting a local PPG Chairs' network to share information and learning
- hosting a practice and PPG cheese and wine evening with and for people who attend the local Synagogue
- working in partnership with a range of local community organisations to organise an open meeting for local people involving information stalls run by different community organisations as well as the PPG
- working with the local carers' centre to involve and support carers in the PPG

Useful resource: Londonwide LMCs' resource and signposting list. [Download here.](#)

Feedback on what happens because of your PPG activity

Whatever activity your PPG undertakes it is extremely important to regularly feedback on the results of that activity, to help widen participation in your PPG.

Feedback not only to the people involved in that activity but to all the practice team and your wider patient population.

Feeding back on what you've achieved, whether big or small achievements, will help make those who participated feel they are valued, that their participation was worthwhile and encourage them to participate again. It will help encourage others to participate in the future. It's an opportunity to celebrate the impact of your PPG.

Use all the opportunities you have available to communicate what your PPG has achieved and how to get involved, eg, your practice newsletter or website; face to face meetings; the websites or newsletters of other local organisations; individual communications to groups you've worked with (and individuals if appropriate and in line with data protection requirements); use Londonwide LMCs' Patient Engagement Project (PEP) web page to share your learning and successes with PPGs and practice teams across the capital by [clicking here.](#)

3. Developing a virtual PPG

Virtual PPGs are likely to be more representative of your patient population than PPGs which only offer the option of meeting face to face.

The same basic principles that help a face to face PPG to be effective also apply to virtual PPGs, eg, having clear terms of reference.

Virtual PPGs can complement and guide the work of those PPG members that meet face to face.

Feedback from practices and PPGs engaging with Londonwide LMCs' PEP indicates that PPGs with a combination of virtual and face to face options for involvement are effective in reaching and engaging the wider patient population and acting to benefit both patients and the practice.

A definition of a virtual PPG

"An online group of patients who agree to participate in consultation and discussion with the aim of improving the patient experience. This requires patients to be able to discuss issues online with one another, respond to surveys easily; ensuring that responses to consultation, feedback and discussion are summarised and fed back to the group".

This is the definition of a virtual PPG offered in the handbook "How to develop and support an online Patient Participation Group" produced by Brighton and Hove CCG in partnership with a local community organisation.

Thank you to them for permission to use information from their handbook which you can [download in full here](#).

NB the local contacts and organisations referenced in the handbook apply to Brighton and Hove only.

Choosing a platform for your virtual PPG

If you have, or are developing, options for both face to face PPG meetings and a virtual PPG then you need clear terms of reference for both and for how they interact with and inform each other.

You also need to be clear and up to date on data protection legislation and best practice. Please visit the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website for further information on your data protection responsibilities: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/>.

You should also be aware of the General Data Protection Regulations that will be enforced from May 2018. Further information is available on the ICO website here: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/>.

Options for the platform for a virtual PPG

Options range from email groups to those that enable you to have online meetings, post documents and speak through a chat box to those who participate.

There are commercial options for virtual PPG platforms, these include myppg which is operated and run by Practice Index (<http://www.myppg.co.uk/>).

There are, of course, pros and cons to all options, and your PPG and practice partners, practice manager and practice team will want to debate together and decide what is most appropriate and realistic for your patient population and practice.

Whatever option you choose to pursue your PPG and practice need to be clear on terms of reference for your virtual PPG and who takes responsibility for the group.

Options include

- **Email groups** – are relatively easy to set up, are free, and enable patients to directly respond to the practice. Email groups may mean that patients are unable to interact with each other and that the practice manager, rather than PPG members, controls and remains responsible for the virtual PPG.
- **Google groups** – a free web-based service that lets users create discussion **groups** with threaded conversations and **group** email addresses.
- **Yahoo groups** – moderated free to use web based groups where members post messages using the internet rather than emails. A Yahoo group could have shared moderator responsibility between patients and practice.
- **Google Hangouts** – free to use and allows members to initiate and participate in text, voice or video chats, either one-on-one or in a group.
- **Adobe Connect** – software used to create information and general presentations, online training materials, web conferencing, learning modules and user desktop sharing. There are various payment plans for Adobe Connect.

Useful resources:

- National Association for Patient Participation. [Download here](#).
- Brighton and Hove CCG "How to develop and support an online Participation Group". [Download here](#).

4. Be proportionate, identify your priorities and plan what you'll do to achieve your goals

The size and resources of your practice and PPG, and your PPG priorities, will be specific to you.

When aiming to widen participation in your PPG build from where you are now, involve PPG members and practice team members in identifying your priorities and creating and delivering a realistic action plan to help you achieve them.

Useful resources:

- "Setting the future framework for your PPG". [Download here](#).
- Londonwide LMCs' patient engagement resource and signposting list. [Download here](#).



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