

## **The Islington LINK Guide to Successful Patient Participation Groups**

Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) have long been known to make a positive improvement to the quality of care that a GP practice can provide by promoting the proactive engagement of patients. Islington LINK is keen to encourage all local GP practices to establish a PPG. As part of our initial data gathering, we surveyed all Islington practices between October and December 2010 and found that PPGs existed in only seven of the 38 practices within Islington; we learned subsequently that only five of these PPGs were active.

The survey findings, together with our offer of assistance to any practice, were presented to the Practice Managers' Forum and the Islington Local Medical Committee early in 2011.

The Department of Health actively supports involving patients in decisions about the range and quality of services provided by their practice. This is currently incentivised by means of a Directed Enhanced Service (DES) which provides financial remuneration to encourage such involvement. Both the BMA and the Royal College of General Practitioners strongly support PPGs.

The DES proposes two kinds of patient participation: the face-to-face PPG and the virtual Patient Reference Group (PRG). There is a requirement to demonstrate that the practice has attempted to engage patients representative of their patient list demographics, at least through out-reach if not attendance at meetings.

### **Purpose of PPGs**

PPGs are based on cooperation between the practice staff and patients and help to improve two-way communication, particularly important in the light of current NHS changes. PPGs encourage patients to reflect on their own experiences and on the physical environment of the practice and access to services.

### **Ways in which PPGs can help the practice**

- Providing patient feedback on consultation times and access to services.
- Advising on the effectiveness of different methods of communication such as telephone, letters or website.
- Raising awareness of the concerns of specific cultural or ethnic groups.
- Providing constructive comments on practice leaflets, notice boards and the practice website.
- Collaborating with practice staff to organise health promotion events or activities (such as a walking group or exercise class).
- Helping provide the patient perspective when planning practice improvements.
- Helping the practice staff with surveys on patient satisfaction.

### **How do PPGs get started**

Members can be recruited in various ways. The personal touch is important – it is best if the invitation comes from a GP or the practice manager. This helps create the impression that the PPG is important to the practice. Some practices start by inviting a small group of patients to become “critical friends” and help plan for wider involvement. Recruitment from the wider patient body can be achieved through:

- Advertising on the practice notice boards, newsletter and website.
- Message on the practice electronic screen.
- A note on the bottom of prescriptions.
- Inclusion in the practice leaflet (particularly useful for engaging new patients).
- Texts or emails.

- Specifically engaging individuals from different ethnic, cultural or faith groups to provide a more representative demographic balance.
- Personal letter of invitation from a GP to a select or random sample of the patient population.
- Engaging patients and carers at specific clinics.
- Asking local community groups such as residents' or tenants' associations or disability organisations to spread the word.

### **At PPG meetings**

Although the practice manager is likely to be the organiser, it is important that at least one GP attends part of the meeting as this lends prestige in the eyes of the patients. It is important to be clear about the purpose of the PPG and to emphasise that it is not a forum for individual concerns or complaints; this can be achieved by firm chairing. Most existing PPGs do not have problems with "complainers" because members tend to be long-time registrants at the practice and have stayed there because of their satisfaction. Meeting times and days should be varied to attract the greatest number and diversity of patients. Patients may volunteer to take minutes or the practice manager may do so.

### **The Patient Reference Group (PRG)**

A PRG, most likely to be an email community that is consulted regularly, can be a useful means of surveying patients' views. With the results publicised and acted upon, this can be a clear indication of a responsive practice. In fact, this is a necessary requirement of the DES. If not already being done, practices may need to start collecting email addresses from their patients. The purpose should be made clear together with assurances of confidentiality.

### **Sustainability**

To ensure that the PPG becomes sustainable, it is wise to establish future meeting dates in advance. Minutes should be provided promptly and details of future meetings should be announced in practice newsletters. It is important to allow an opportunity for all participants to contribute to the agenda. Use all the skills of your patients – they are often willing to draft newsletters, make posters or help with recruiting other patients.

### **How Islington LINK can help**

We would be delighted to talk to your practice staff, help promote your PPG through our networks, and come to your first (or subsequent) meetings to help stimulate discussion. We have already visited many practices and have advised a number of GPs, managers, and reception staff, and are happy to continue to do so. Just contact [link@vai.org.uk](mailto:link@vai.org.uk)

### **National Association for Patient Participation:**

<http://www.napp.org.uk/resources/getting-started/>

### **Directed Enhanced Service and related FAQ:**

<http://www.nhsemployers.org/Aboutus/Publications/Documents/Patient-participation-directed-enhanced-services.pdf>

[http://www.bma.org.uk/patients\\_public/ppgintro.jsp](http://www.bma.org.uk/patients_public/ppgintro.jsp)

[http://www.bma.org.uk/employmentandcontracts/independent\\_contractors/enhanced\\_services/patientpartdes.jsp](http://www.bma.org.uk/employmentandcontracts/independent_contractors/enhanced_services/patientpartdes.jsp)

**Islington Local Involvement Network:** <http://www.vai.org.uk/services/networks/islington-link/>

### **Information on Local Community Groups:**

Voluntary Action Islington: [www.vai.org.uk](http://www.vai.org.uk)

