



Registered Charity No. 292157

Ten Minute Guide to Joining A PPG

This is the fifth in a series of Ten Minute Guides produced by the National Association for Patient Participation. It offers some information and advice for people who are new to patient participation. For more information, visit www.napp.org.uk

1. Introduction

Patient Participation Groups (PPG) are not new. The first were formed in 1972 and now roughly one in three GP surgeries has a PPG. But they are still not very well known and most people do not know what they do. This note explains how Groups work and what their functions are. One word of caution: there is no single model for a PPG. Every Group is different and we feel that is a good thing. It means that the Group can develop according to the wishes of patients in each practice.

2. Patient Participation Groups: the essentials

PPGs tend to be set up by their practices but, over time, they are normally run by the patients. Typically, they will have a committee that meets regularly to give the Group some leadership and a sense of direction. The PPG should work closely with the practice and it is quite normal for practice staff, including GPs, to be part of the Group.

PPGs are not set up to be a "forum for moaners" but nor are they "doctors' fan clubs". They are a route for patients to advise the practice on what matters most to patients and to identify solutions to problems. Members of PPGs should think about the wider patient interest and not just their own personal concerns when serving on the PPG.

Every PPG should be clear about what it is there to achieve. It should have well thought out objectives so that, if someone asks what the Group does, there is a clear answer. These goals need to be realistic because the PPG is run by volunteers. In many cases, the PPG will work in partnership with the practice and other partners and, in that way, it can achieve a great deal more.

3. What do Groups do?

This is a general guide and N.A.P.P. does not know what your particular Group does. We can, however, share with you what PPGs are doing across the country. As noted above, the activities of PPGs vary because they develop to meet local need. They include:

- 3.1 Improving communication by producing newsletters or leaflets that provide patients with information about their health and how to access services
- 3.2 Organising health promotion events, together with the practice, so that patients can have a really good understanding of their health and how best to look after it
- 3.3 Acting as a "critical friend" to the practice, helping it to understand what patients think about some of the issues such as opening hours, telephone systems, seeing your favourite GP, available services and so on
- 3.4 Helping to fill some of the gaps in services by signposting patients to available support or providing services such as patient libraries, volunteer transport, befriending and support groups
- 3.5 Fundraising to support the work of the PPG and to improve the care that is available to patients of the surgery
- 3.6 Influencing the services that are provided, and where they are provided, by taking part in what are called commissioning decisions: this means that services can be developed in the way that is best for patients
- 3.7 Carrying out research to find out what matters to patients and discussing the findings with the practice

4. Getting involved

To some people this will seem rather daunting. But rest assured that PPGs across the country, run by patients, are doing these things and making a real difference. Choose the level of involvement that suits you best, whether as a committee member or just helping out once in a while. It is all voluntary and every contribution is valued.

5. Some tips

If you do get involved with the Group, we suggest that:

- 5.1 You work with the PPG to ensure that it has a clear remit and that this is communicated with the wider practice population
- 5.2 You always work constructively and positively, helping to identify solutions and work in partnership with the practice and other local organisations
- 5.3 You are realistic about what can be achieved and you also look for quick wins and small changes that can make a real difference
- 5.4 You visit the N.A.P.P. website (if you use the internet) at www.napp.org.uk
- 5.5 You encourage the PPG to work with other PPGs in your area as many of the problems can only be solved across a number of practices.

We wish you every success at whatever level of involvement is best for you.

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