

What are the challenges facing Patient Participation Groups in Kent?

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Kent has been hearing from Patient Participations Groups (PPG) from all over Kent about their work and the challenges that they face.

From April 1st of this year, all GP Practices must have a PPG to meet their contractual obligations. With this in mind, Healthwatch Kent undertook a project to gather feedback from PPGs groups and practices, identify best practice and make recommendations on how some of the challenges could be overcome.

What did we find?

Across Kent, there is great breadth in PPG experience, structure and practices.

98 PPG members and practice representatives responded to our in-depth survey and we spoke on the phone with a further 16 practices. This has given us a snapshot and provided some insight into the issues facing PPGs and practices. Of those 16 practices we spoke to in November / December 2015, only 10 reported having a PPG group, while four were developing a PPG; one practice's PPG was no longer functioning, another small practice was focusing on their open relationship with patients rather than a PPG, and the remaining 6 were not doing anything at all.

Some practice representatives talked positively about the PPG at their practice, noting that PPG members regularly attended meetings and made positive contributions. Others appreciated the participation of PPG members, though questioned the effectiveness of the PPG as a patient voice and action group. Feedback from PPG members ranged widely, but similar concerns about effectiveness were raised.

The themes we identified

The following themes affected the planning, delivery and effectiveness of the PPG, and its interactions with patients, the practice and wider health organisations. The report provides further information on these themes (issues, recommendations & good practice examples).

- **PPG-practice relationship and governance structures:** the relationship between the PPG and the practice needs to be clearly defined and enabling, ideally guided by a set of terms and working procedures. Otherwise outcomes were felt to be weak and motivation vastly reduced. PPGs needed planned actions and tangible outcomes to feel effective and demonstrate their value.
- **Access to information and support:** PPGs were clearly in need of supporting information such as local population data, commissioning structures, the evolving health context and policy developments within primary care. Both PPGs and Practices told us that they need development support to strengthen the role of the PPG and its effectiveness. Our report gives detailed information and recommendations for both Healthwatch and the CCGs.
- **Visibility and status:** PPGs told us they wanted to be recognised and valued at a practice level. They want to be part of the culture of the organisation. To do that they need a range of communication routes and evidence of their work in order to generate interest from members and patients.
- **Patient representation: membership & engagement:** Some developing PPGs were in the process of building membership, however for many, the issue of maintaining

momentum among their existing membership was a more pressing concern. There was a strong feeling of frustration amongst PPG members who felt they were 'wasting their time'. The core membership of PPGs was not representative of the wider patient population. However, some felt that this was acceptable if the core group had the skills and strategies to engage with their community to gather and raise people's views.

ACTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the feedback from PPGs centred around lack of support, guidance and information. However, every Group and Practice had very different and unique challenges. There is not a one size fits all solution.

Healthwatch Kent will undertake the following:

- Develop a PPG Good Practice Framework which is based on best practice and guidance. We will share this with all Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and PPGs
- We will train our volunteers in the Best Practice and facilitation
- Using our knowledge and intelligence we will work with the CCGs and PPG Chairs to identify which PPGs may be in need of support
- We will offer support to three PPGs in each CCG area at any one time
- Our volunteers will meet with the PPG and the Practice and work through the Good Practice Framework.
- Healthwatch volunteers will produce a short action plan outlining the areas the individual PPG and Practice may need
- We will discuss these findings with the CCG to determine what support they can offer too.
- The progress of this support will be monitored through 6 weekly meetings with volunteers
- We will review what outcomes have been achieved after 12 months

In addition, PPGs expressed a desire to get more involved with the day to day activity of Healthwatch Kent. We will involve PPGs in core Healthwatch Kent through the following ways:

- a) **Local projects:** where Healthwatch Kent is conducting relevant work in a particular area, we will share information with local PPG groups. PPGs may be involved where appropriate, for example, in sharing feedback about particular local services. For this to succeed, PPG groups will need to share their contact details with Healthwatch.
- b) **Gathering and acting on public feedback:** PPGs should feel encouraged to share all feedback about any health and social care service to Healthwatch Kent. We can then amplify your voice and escalate the issues PPGs have identified. We will ensure our communication channels remain open with feedback on developments to PPGs and practices.
- c) **Information provision:** We will collate all the existing resources available to PPGs. Groups can contact our central Freephone line to assist with future queries.

Next Steps

- Share our report and our recommendations with all Kent CCGs and PPGs
- Secure support for our recommendations from all CCG and PPG Chair of Chairs
- Launch the PPG Good Practice Framework and support mechanisms