

Briefing for Barnet Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Support for Patient Participation Groups in Barnet

What are Patient Participation Groups (PPGs)?

PPGs are groups associated with local GP practices comprising staff members of the practice and a cohort of registered patients from the practice who volunteer to 'represent' the wider patient community. The PPG acts primarily as a conduit for communications between the practice and the patients enabling issues and ideas related to health service provision to be discussed and, hopefully, resolved at practice level. Some PPGs extend their role to provide complementary services at the practice. It is important to note that all GP practices are contractually obliged to create a PPG and that the CQC takes an interest (e.g. requests meeting with PPG Chair) in patient engagement during its practice inspections.

Why is support needed for PPGs and who provides it?

Staff in GP practices are generally unfamiliar with working with volunteers and the concept of patient engagement is relatively new.

Many comprehensive 'toolkits' to support practices with implementing the requirement for a PPG are widely available many practices in Barnet have not established PPGs. Barnet CCG decided to provide face-to-face support for the development of local PPGs and commissioned CommUNITY Barnet, working closely with Healthwatch Barnet, to deliver this function in the form of a 12 month project commencing March 2017.

What activities are undertaken by the PPG support project?

The information available about local PPGs was quite limited at the start so that the focus throughout has been on establishing links with both practices and patient representatives, identifying their needs and responding to them as constructively as possible. Ongoing support activities include:

- undertaking a series of on-line surveys to identify the baseline position with existing groups and the needs of PPGs
- publishing a 6-weekly e-newsletter – PPG ENGAGE – for PPG members containing useful health-related information, ideas for developing your PPG and details of local PPG activities
- creating a series of short information briefings on specific topics in response to requests from practices and publishing them on the Healthwatch Barnet website
- creating generic promotional material for recruitment of patient representatives and customising it for use by individual practices
- face-to-face meetings with individual practice managers/patients and PPGs to discuss support needs and agree future actions
- actively contributing to the work of the emerging pan-Barnet PPG network
- facilitated a networking of PPGs including a formal meeting of the Barnet CCG Lay Member for Patient and Public Engagement (Ian Bretman) and PPG Chairs

- training events designed for both patients and practice in support of PPG development
- extensive and ongoing follow-up of all practices including those that have not engaged with the project

Findings arising from the PPG Support Project

Some of the findings that have arisen in the project are:

- Creating a successful PPG requires the active collaboration of both parties (i.e. practice staff and patients) in what is effectively a joint enterprise
- Practice managers are most often the 'lead' person from the practice in regard to the PPG but their efforts need the active support of the GP partners at the practice to ensure that this area of work is prioritised. GP and practice staff capacity is often an issue: however there are positive relationships and constructive work where staff and patients have collaborated.
- Although practices have a contractual obligation to create a PPG, patients are voluntary participants and in some locations it is difficult to recruit (particularly for an organisation not familiar with recruiting volunteers) PPGs are intended to be patient-led and chaired by a patient representative but membership details are not in the public domain and initial contact with a PPG can only be made via a practice.
- Some PPGs have a limited view of their role (i.e. quarterly committee-style meetings) whereas successful PPGs have found it easier to engage the interest of patients in more practical tasks that are of direct benefit to patients and complement the work of the health professionals