

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2023 / 24**

At the 2023 AGM, two new members, Charles Cook and Paul Chambers joined the existing committee members, Russell Cleaver, John O'Connor Penny Allum and Steve Palmer. Sadly, Steve passed away in February. The Committee met on two occasions during the year, reviewing the 2023/4 Action Plan, rolled forward from the previous year. As the practice numbers of registered patients approaches 35,000, the Committee needs to be strengthened, to make significant progress.

### **1. COMMUNICATIONS and INFORMATION**

Whilst the PG has been kept well-informed about changes and developments by the practice manager, our efforts to engage with more patients have produced few results with only a trickle or responses to the leaflets and posters displayed in patient waiting areas. The suggestion of setting up an information stand in the local Morrisons may be considered in the forthcoming year.

The PG strongly supports a recent innovation by the practice whereby all patients registered for SMS text-messaging are now sent a form after each appointment inviting feedback on their experience.

### **2. PROJECTS**

#### **The Patients Association (PA) - led Patients Group Support Project**

Offering support to PPGs across Herts and West Essex, this project terminated on 31 March, but the Steering Group continues, supported by a core group of activists, the Patient Engagement Forum, which now hosts a 'closed' Facebook page for any Herts/West Essex patient to register and participate in health-related issues.

#### **Social Prescribing / Health & Well-being**

Following organisational changes, the practice has employed 2 new Link Workers to assist GPs in exploring non-clinical solutions to the well-being needs of patients, by signposting them to appropriate voluntary or statutory bodies. Our PG is keen to explore ways of promoting this pathway, meeting up with the link workers. Specifically, in collaboration with Cassiobury parkrun, our PG is taking a lead role in distributing parkrun posters for display in Watford GP surgeries, pharmacies and supermarkets.

#### **Shadowing**

Three Committee members have now spent sessions shadowing reception and 'back room' staff at the practice, experiencing their workload and range of day-to-day issues faced. This opportunity was welcomed and overall, a strong sense of camaraderie and commitment was observed.

#### **Carers' Support**

The practice now has over 700 registered carers and the practice Carers' Champions continues to arrange occasional coffee morning events which the PG is invited to

support. Two of our committee members attended a useful meeting of the Watford Carers Support Group to exchange information and ideas.

### **Telephone System**

The practice continues to review and improve ways of communicating with patients regarding their appointment's requests. A call-back feature by which callers in a queue can elect to 'hang up' or be called back within a short timeframe has proved to be very popular and time-saving.

### **Technological Advances and proactive healthcare**

With the number of people waiting to start hospital treatment reaching a record high, more emphasis is being placed on preventive healthcare, harnessing technological advances. For example, getting results of diagnostic tests on our phones, followed up by personalised information and advice about how to make relevant lifestyle changes to improve our health. As a step in that direction, the PG encourages use of the NHS app which is prominently displayed on the practice website.

### **Appropriate Appointments Simulation**

As part of the nationwide GP Improvement Programme (GPIP), the practice has been trialling a simulation exercise, designed to ensure patients get to see the correct clinician or service in the right timeframe. This involved over 30 practice staff being given different health scenarios and having to decide which clinician they should see and their priority. This exercise revealed differences in recommended actions and should assist developing a model which will enable GPs to save time to review patients with more complex needs.

## **3. NETWORKING**

The continued increase in patient numbers has led to the practice ceasing to be a partner of the Grand Union Primary Care Network (PCN), becoming Bridgewater Surgeries PCN from 1 April. This will provide more freedom and opportunities to employ staff such as Social Prescribers, in-house. Our PG will continue to reach out to other local PGs such as nearby New Road / Baldwins Lane merged surgery, working towards a possible joint webinar.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

With the demands on the practice continuing to increase and the limited human resources available to the Patients Group, it has been difficult to make marked progress with our Action Plan. However, the PG will continue to strive working closely with the practice, but with increased patient support, the PG could be that much more effective.

**Russell Cleaver**

**Chair**

**May 2024**