

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 / 23

Emerging from the pandemic, the PPG Committee (Russell Cleaver, John O'Connor, Penny Allum and Steve Palmer) met on 2 occasions during the year. The Action Plan from the 2022 AGM covered the following 4 headings: Communications, Information, Projects and Networking. The continuing difficulty in attracting additional Committee members has impeded progress, resulting in limited headway in certain areas, though some encouraging signs in others.

1. COMMUNICATIONS

Whilst the practice continues to be under capacity and staffing pressures, the PPG has been kept well-informed of changes and developments occurring during the year. Much more problematic has been our attempts to stimulate interest amongst patients to engage with the PPG, in spite of recruitment leaflets being available in the practice waiting area and the adjacent Bridgewater Pharmacy. A more recent measure has been for the practice to systematically invite all new patients registering, to also join the PPG e-mailing list. It follows that the PPG target of reaching 100 patients on its register (from 50+) was not reached.

2. INFORMATION

A major on-going concern - nationally and locally – continues to be the process and ease of access to GPs by patients and in particular the vagaries of 'on-line' consulting. During the year the practice has continually monitored and reviewed patient appointments arrangements, making adjustments and changes where needed. These have been explained to the PPG at face-to-face meetings. The PPG was also assured that although new patients were continuing to register with the practice, GP staffing levels were being maintained.

PROJECTS

The Patients Association-led PPG Support Project

Initiated by the new Integrated Care Board (ICB) for Herts and West Essex, this scheme has aimed to offer stimulation and support to PPGs. Emerging from a series of 4 on-line workshops last Autumn, the on-going steering group is now setting up a 'Buddy Group' (which includes 2 members of this PPG Committee) to respond to practices where PPGs are struggling. Initially, priority will probably be given by Buddies to those practices within their Primary Care Network (PCN).

Practice Website

A new supplier (Practice 365) reviewed and updated the website last year, resulting in a much clearer and user-friendly site. However, the process for patients needing to make an appointment is still rather complex and is under continuing review. Access to PPG information could also be simplified.

Social Prescribing

The PPG is still keen to promote Social Prescribing, which takes a holistic approach to the individual's health and well-being, by giving them more control over their lives and what things affect them by finding non-clinical solutions to their well-being needs where this is the appropriate action. A team of Link Workers now covers the PCN area and the PPG needs to hear first-hand about how the scheme is working.

Carers' Support

The practice has about 600 registered carers and last year designated a staff member as 'Carers Champion' to focus in their needs. During national Carers Week, a coffee morning was held at the practice when 2 PPG members were present in support. More recently, an invitation from the Watford Carers Support Group has been received for PPG representatives to meet them to explore areas of mutual interest.

Shadowing

For the PPG to gain a better understanding of the pressures and complexities facing practice staff, the idea of committee members shadowing staff, particularly receptionists, is currently being mooted.

Technological Advances

Following on from the acute pressures on practices arising from the COVID pandemic, the PPG is aware of various technological measures being developed as additions and alternatives to face-to-face consultations with GPs where a face-to-face appointment isn't necessary. These include encouraging patients to use apps to help them monitor and manage their condition, thereby reducing the need to see a GP. The practice may consider encouraging patients to purchase their own specialist devices and record readings for their own well-being e.g. blood pressure monitor. The promotion of health apps could also be explored.

3. NETWORKING

The PPG has been kept abreast of Grand Union Primary Care Network (PCN) developments during the year. These have included the pooling of resources to manage the extensive flu and COVID injection programmes, applying the Extended Hours scheme and employing shared staff such as social prescribers and pharmacists. Following on from the Patients Association / PPG Support Scheme (above), the PPG is now making approaches to the other 3 practices within the PCN, with a view to develop collaboration including attempting to engage with the PCN regarding mutual expectations.

CONCLUSION

For yet another year, the PPG has to report that pressures on the practice has meant that joint progress has been more limited than planned. But this report indicates that the Patients Association-led PPG Support Project and the developing Buddy Scheme, if resourced adequately by the Integrated Care Board, could breathe more life into PPGs across the area which should benefit all. However, most PPGs, including this one, continue to face the challenge of convincing more patients that becoming informed and involved can 'make a difference' and we urge more patients to join us for the challenges of the coming year.

Russell Cleaver

Chair

May 2023