

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Due to the continuing COVID 19 pandemic, the PPG failed yet again to hold an AGM so the committee members elected in 2019 agreed to continue in office for another year. As at December 2021 these were: Russell Cleaver (Chair), John O'Connor (Secretary), Penny Allum, Phil Soskin, Frances Kipping.

PROPOSALS FOR 2021

Realising the severe pressures the practice would be under in 2021 yet also appreciating that the PPG could achieve little unilaterally and with its few resources, the PPG's aims and objectives were deliberately low-key. They are summarised as follows:

- # to keep in regular zoom contact with the practice to maintain dialogue and share news and views
- # to reach and communicate with more patients, update and build up our e-contact Patient Register
- # to issue a periodic practice / PPG joint Newsletter which would enable the PPG to seek views of patients including suggestions to improve the performance of the practice
- # to raise the level of awareness of the PPG and attract patients who have something to offer the PPG
- # to continue reviewing the practice website and suggest improvements, learning from other practice websites
- # to continue networking locally via Herts Valley CCG Patients Engagement Meetings

2021 – A SUMMARY

The first COVID vaccination clinics at the practice started in December 2020 and continued throughout 2021, with booster and flu jab clinics added from the autumn. E-Consult, the on-line method of patients seeking appointments with their GP, kicked in during early 2021, thereby slightly reducing the number of calls into the practice. As the practice swung towards responding to the demands of the ongoing pandemic, the PPG was only able to make limited progress towards achieving its aims for 2021.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PRACTICE

Due to heavy work pressures, PPG contact with the practice has been irregular. Useful zoom sessions were held with Lisa Mackin, Business Manager in February and March, then face-to-face meetings in May and November. It was made clear that the practice was working to full capacity throughout the year, even with additional administrative resources. Early in 2021, the idea of the practice producing a Patient Newsletter was shelved but it was still hoped the practice could update and refresh its Virtual Register of patients and consider holding a patient webinar, but these plans were also put on hold. The November review session was useful in setting some short-term targets.

PRACTICE WEBSITE

In June, the PPG was invited to join a working group led by Dr Carefull to review the practice website. Three committee members took part and contributed various suggestions, having researched 'good practices' on the websites of some other practices in S W Herts. With the aim of producing a clearer, updated and more attractive website, this is work in progress. The PPG welcomes this move, hoping that work will be ongoing and it will be regularly consulted.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS BY MEDICAL STUDENTS

In November, once again, PPG members responded to a request from Dr Monica Deb, Medical Student Supervisor to act as interviewees to assist 1st Year Medical Students in practicing their interview skills on older patients, a useful exercise for all concerned.

HERTS VALLEY CLINICAL CARE COMMISSIONING GROUP (CCG)

The CCG has continued to hold intermittent zoom sessions throughout the year, keeping PPGs in touch with current events across S W Herts. Updates included speakers from Herts Mental Health Services, Cancer Services, Arthritis Action and Virtual Hospitals.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PATIENTS PARTICIPATION (NAPP)

As an affiliated member of NAPP, the PPG taps into their website for updates and new ideas. This website underwent a major upgrade during 2021 and now includes a Forum section where topics can be raised, inviting comments and the PPG has started utilising this.

NEWS FROM THE PRACTICE - AWARDS

In October, Bridgewater Surgeries was declared winner of the Herts Valleys CCG 'GP Practice of the Year' award. The practice was also shortlisted for the national GP Team of the Year award.

CONCLUSION

From this Report, it is clear that with the practice being subject to huge pressures, the PPG has also been faced with substantial operational difficulties, the extent of which was not foreseen a year ago. The gap therefore between our aims stated above and the actuality is admittedly substantial. Looking ahead, we have to re-visit and re-inforce our priorities but also recruit additional committee members from the around 30,000 registered patients, to help provide the necessary energy and sense of direction. Major organisational challenges lie ahead with the national creation of Integrated Care Boards (ICB) (July 2022) under the new Health & Care legislation. Locally this means the disbandment of Herts Valley CCG and the birth of NHS Herts and West Essex ICB, covering 1.5m population. The implications for PPGs are unclear.

A REMINDER.

For now, it is still a requirement within the GP contract for all surgeries to form a PPG to ensure that there is a formal mechanism for open and proactive dialogue between the practice and the patient community.

Russell Cleaver

Chair

December 2021