

Development of Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) in Sunderland





Distribution List:

Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group

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Debbie Burnicle, Deputy Chief Officer

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North East Commissioning Services

Caroline Latta, Senior Communications and Engagement Locality Manager

HealthNet Sunderland

Gillian McDonough, Chief Officer of VCAS



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1. Executive Summary

Healthwatch Sunderland (HWS) supported the development of Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) across Sunderland during the period April 2016 to March 2017.

A wide range of attitudes and experiences towards PPGs was discovered, ranging from vibrant and participative meetings, to no meetings or PPG at all from some practices.

During the project timescale, HWS supported the creation of new PPGs (see the Case Study as an example of how we helped), provided extra guidance to those PPGs already in existence through the provision of a Best practice Guide, and received commitment from the practices who are yet to hold a PPG, that they will continue the work started and hold a PPG in the short term.

The following observations and recommendations are provided to Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group (SCCG), to support their objective to invigorate the PPG arena:

- Public facing practice staff were not aware of the benefits of PPGs to the patients and the practice. HWS recommends patient experience and patient participation is a regular topic of refresher training for practice staff and has a regular slot on team meetings to ensure patient feedback is taken into account
- There is a general lack of diversity across many PPGs. HWS have supported an initiative to create interest amongst younger people in supporting their local practice, and this is being promoted on an ongoing basis by HWS
- Many practices are unaware of how to set up and run effective groups. HWS have developed a Best Practice Guide, which has evolved based upon feedback from our visits to practices, and national good practice. Furthermore, SCCG have committed to pay for one year's free membership for all practices to the National Association of Patient Participation (NAPP). HWS recommends SCCG follow up with all practices to ensure this funding has been taken up
- At March 2017 all practices have confirmed that they have active PPGs in place, or that they have plans to run their first PPG shortly. 25 advise they also have Virtual Practice Groups (VPGs). Membership stands at 300+ PPG members, and more than 1250 VPG members.
- As each practice has now attested to (or is shortly due to) having a PPG, as part of its annual declaration to NHS England. There is an opportunity for SCCG to utilise PPGs to invigorate the participation, engagement and consultation methods across all five localities for specific commissioning changes such as Urgent Care, as well as receiving ongoing feedback from existing media such as the Health Forum.



2. Introduction

What is Healthwatch?

Local Healthwatch have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion whose aim is to:

- **Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services in order to better meet their needs and**
- **Enable people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.**

Healthwatch Sunderland works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services.

What is a PPG?

To deliver high quality services, it is important that GP Practices involve patients and the public in making decisions about services and evaluating their success. PPGs offer views on GP services from the patients' perspective.

PPGs are critical friends within the practice environment, to ensure that services are responsive to patients' needs, and that they improve over time. Every PPG is unique, evolving to meet local needs. They can carry out research, arrange health awareness and information events, and carry out patient surveys. Most commonly they exist to find out what patients think, and meet with the practice manager, GPs and other practice staff, to identify improvements and contribute towards carrying out change. They can also support people to find additional services and support in the community (CQC, **A guide for working together: June 2013**).

Background and rationale

In 2015, NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group (SCCG) reviewed its public and patient involvement and engagement activity, and identified recommendations for development of engagement activity.

One of the recommendations was in relation to the development of GP Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) across Sunderland.



The invigoration of existing PPGs with the development of new PPGs would help to ensure that SCCG:

- Complied with its statutory duties
- Met the requirements of national policy and guidelines in relation to engagement and involvement
- Realised its strategic engagement objectives

From 1 April 2016 it is a contractual requirement for all GP practices to:

- develop and maintain a PPG that gains the views of patients and carers and enables the practice to obtain feedback from the practice population
- to make reasonable efforts for the PPG to be representative of the practice population
- to engage with the PPG at a frequency and manner agreed with the group
- to review patient feedback with the aims of the practice and PPG agreeing on improvements that could be made to services
- To act on suggestions for improvements where the practice and PPG agree.

Evidence of meeting these requirements is by self-declaration annually via the electronic practice self-declaration (**SCCG Service Level Agreement: April 2016**).

In March 2016 Healthwatch Sunderland was awarded the contract by SCCG to develop PPGs in Sunderland. The contract ran from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

A PPG Coordinator role was created with dedicated responsibility for setting up and developing existing PPGs to ensure a consistent approach across Sunderland.



3. Methodology

All Practice Managers and patient group members from across the five Sunderland localities were invited to attend a workshop on 16th March 2016 at the Stadium of Light to discuss what help and support was required to have an effective PPG.

The main findings from the focus groups held at the event were:

- PPGs should be patient led
- Close working relations between practice staff and patients was essential
- PPG membership should be inclusive and reflect the views of all patients of the practice
- Support for PPGs around issues of structure and sustainability was required
- Effective communication to members and practice patients, enabling those who could not attend groups to have their say too

Using this knowledge, the PPG Coordinator met on a one to one basis with PPG Practice Leads and PPG Patient Leads to discuss their individual requirements. Regular meetings were also held with SCCG Locality Managers for Primary Care.

A telephone survey was undertaken with GP practices to gauge the awareness of PPGs amongst their reception / admin staff, to ascertain how easy it would be for a patient to find out information from their local practice.

CQC Reports were researched where available to ascertain the impact of PPGs during previous CQC visits, with Best Practice being drawn from any feedback provided.

A Best Practice Guide was created and has evolved during the lifespan of the project, drawing on best practice and legal requirements, and has been provided to each practice. During the project phase, these Best practice Guides received excellent feedback from practice and patient leads as a useful guide.

One year's free membership to the National Association of Patient Participation (NAPP) was negotiated between SCCG and NAPP and has been provided to every practice in the five Sunderland localities.



4. Findings

Staff Awareness

As part of our remit to create vibrant and proactive PPGs, we wanted to understand from a patient perspective how easy it would be to find out information from their local practice about their next PPG meeting.

During May 2016, the HWS team contacted 32 of the 50 Sunderland GP Practices asking when their next PPG was.

Only 6 (19%) of the receptionists who answered our calls were able to provide us with the information, whilst 18 (56%) of the receptionists had an understanding of what a PPG is.

Using this information we were able to tailor our approach in the practices we visited, ensuring where possible, we spoke to the wider team who had interactions with the public, and helping them understand what a PPG is.

With staff turnover, and competing pressures on staff for a wide range of initiatives, HWS recommend that SCCG locality team maintain patient participation and engagement as a constant feature on team agendas and when considering training needs.

Equality and Diversity

Discussions with practice and patient leads for PPGs highlighted that there was no formal requirement to maintain records on the diversity of the make-up of individual PPGs. Section 5H of the practice annual e-declaration states:

- The practice is able to show that the PPG is properly representative of its practice population or that it has made and continues to make efforts to ensure it is representative of its local population.

This requirement is satisfied by a Yes / No response from the practice.

The Best Practice Guide outlines examples of good record keeping, and ideas to increase the diversity of the PPG; ongoing support is further provided via NAPP.

To illustrate the benefits of having a diverse group, HWS chose one 'seldom heard' group and undertook an initiative to engage younger people, and understand barriers for a younger person to becoming involved in their local PPG.



During January 2017, HWS welcomed two students from Bede College for their work experience to help us in this regard. The students asked their peers via a short survey for their opinions on a promotional leaflet for PPGs with younger people in mind.

They produced a short report (**Appendix 1**) from their findings, including their recommendations regarding how they felt the leaflet should look and how PPGs should be promoted to help encourage the involvement of younger people.

The students also met with Paul Weddle, Practice Manager from Millfield Medical Practice, and David Francos, Chair of Villette Road Practice PPG to present their findings. During the meeting the students gave their opinions on how practices could encourage recruitment of new members onto their PPGs. This included practice staff highlighting potential members during their visits to the practice, explaining the PPG to them and asking them if they would be interested in becoming members. The students felt this would be a good way of encouraging a diverse mix of people from different ethnicities, backgrounds, ages and health needs onto PPGs across the city. Both Paul and David expressed their appreciation of the students work.

The report and outcome of this work has been promoted via the HWS Newsletter, and a new leaflet based on the findings and recommendations from the student has been produced (**Appendix 2**) to encourage the involvement of younger people. The leaflet will be distributed to all practices during Spring 2017, and will be further promoted and diversity encouraged during visits by the HWS team to PPGs.

Best Practice and NAPP

Initial feedback from practice and patient leads was a feeling of a lack of support regarding the set-up of a PPG, and once set up how to effectively run meetings and achieve outcomes. To help share ideas from existing PPGs, the PPG Coordinator created a Best Practice Guide (**Appendix 3**) and has shared this document throughout the project lifecycle. On an ongoing basis, one year's free membership to NAPP has been agreed by Sunderland CCG. NAPP is the organisation which supports PPGs, and membership includes:

- A guide to setting up a PPG: Starting, growing and sustaining successful PPGs
- Ideas to help GP Practices thrive
- A communications toolkit for PPGs



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- A General Medical Council (GMC) copy of 'What to expect from your doctor: a guide for patients
 - A CQC Guide: What standards you have a right to expect from the regulation of your GP Practice
 - Top tips leaflet
 - Up to date reference documents and guidance
 - A monthly bulletin: Patient Matters
 - Access to other PPG members across the country including an online discussion forum
 - Telephone guidance on the formation and development of groups
 - Support for the formation of local PPG networks

There are also other support mechanisms NAPP can provide on an individual basis upon request from PPGs. HWS recommend that SCCG follow up with each practice to ensure they have taken advantage of free membership and are utilising this resource to its best purpose for their individual PPG.

KPIs

At March 2017 all practices have confirmed that they have active PPGs in place, or that they have plans to run their first PPG shortly. 25 advise they also have Virtual Practice Groups (VPGs). Membership stands at 300+ PPG members, and more than 1250 VPG members (based on data received from practice staff).

HWS have contacted all practices in the Sunderland localities and will attend their next PPG to raise awareness of how PPGs can work with HWS to promote the voice of public, patients and carers in Sunderland, and ensure where possible the momentum gained through this year long project is carried forward to the future.

Sunderland CCG

During the project HWS received feedback from practices which we would like to bring to the attention of SCCG.

A minority of PPGs have expressed disappointment that there is no funding available to run meetings to cover logistical requirements such as room hire fees, and printing / stationery costs. Many practices work with their PPG to minimise the impact of this and provide tangible support where appropriate.



Some of the more established PPGs are keen to get involved with more strategic commissioning decision making led by SCCG, such as Urgent Care and the Sunderland / South Tyneside hospital alliance.

The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held in February 2017 highlighted concerns around lack of engagement events for Urgent Care proposals in the Coalfield and Washington areas, noting that SCCG favoured a concentration of engagement in the City itself. SCCG responded to Scrutiny that engagement exercises in the past have suffered from low turnouts in Washington and the Coalfields.

There is also low participation in SCCG Health Forums. Health Forums are held by SCCG to talk to patients, carers, and the public, to give local communities the opportunity to share their opinions with decision makers from SCCG, allowing them to contribute directly to decisions affecting healthcare provision.

- As a CCG, we are determined to hear the voices of patients, as your comments can make a real difference and improve the way we plan and operate services (SCCG website: Health Forums)

As each practice has now attested to having an active PPG via their annual self-declaration, HWS believe there is an opportunity for SCCG to bring together the various mechanisms of communication.

Using the upcoming Sunderland and South Tyneside hospital alliance as an example.

- High level details of the subject matter for consultation can be advertised on the new screens now established in each practice, giving the date, time and venue of the next PPG to be held during the consultation phase
- Part of the agenda can be dedicated to running focus group activity on the alliance proposals - effectively providing 40+ pieces of feedback to the alliance project team in addition to their planned consultation activity
- Outcomes can be fed back to PPGs via the same route to illustrate to participants how their comments have ‘made a real difference to the way the SCCG has planned and operated services’.

Making better use of the existing PPG resource for such activity will bring benefits to all parties:

- Providing easy to reach reference groups for SCCG commissioning teams who are making changes to services



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- PPG members will feel they are being listened to, and this will attract more members
 - Higher levels of engagement interaction, across wider geographical spreads to counteract issues raised by public bodies such as Scrutiny
 - Making it easier for any member of the public who wants to get involved in providing feedback, to understand where to go to, rather than having to trawl through a myriad of websites and documents to find out how to get involved.



5. Case Study

Sharing and Promoting Good Practice: Redhouse Medical Centre

During May 2016 all Sunderland locality GP practices were contacted by our PPG Coordinator offering support for PPG Awareness Week; 6th - 11th June.

Redhouse Medical Centre willingly accepted our support, as the practice did not have an active PPG in place, and we held an information stand to help recruit patient members and raise awareness of the PPG to patients in the waiting area.

We had the opportunity to speak to several patients and generally raise awareness with some interest shown both for an active and a virtual group. For those who were too busy to stop and chat, we provided leaflets for patients to read at their leisure for an understanding of patient and practice benefits of a proactive PPG.

Whilst at the practice we also spoke to practice staff and identified that not all were aware of what a PPG was, and advice was given, along with some PPG leaflets for staff to provide to patients.

As a follow up we helped the practice with ongoing promotional material and ideas such as posters and leaflets, and provided them with format and wording for their website.

We provided the Practice Manager with names and contact details of those patients who had showed an interest and a willingness to be involved in the PPG.

- Thank you so much for forwarding the information on. I am very impressed at how many patients appear interested, that's great news and all a credit to yourself and your colleague yesterday for taking the time to promote PPG on our behalf (Vicki, Deputy Practice Manager)

To help the practice run their first PPG, we suggested the Practice Manager initially offer an informal meeting at the practice, and future dates, times and venues would be discussed to suit the new group for any future formal PPG meetings.

The practice staff have been very proactive and at their first PPG the suggested agenda included the Best Practice Guide and terms of reference, constitution etc., examples of which are all in the Best Practice Guide.



6. Recommendations

Recommendation One

- Public facing practice staff were not aware of the benefits of PPGs to the patients and the practice. HWS recommends patient experience and patient participation is a regular topic of refresher training for practice staff and has a regular slot on team meetings to ensure patient feedback is taken into account

Recommendation Two

- There is a general lack of diversity across many PPGs. HWS have supported an initiative to create interest amongst younger people in supporting their local practice, and this is being promoted on an ongoing basis by HWS

Recommendation Three

- Many practices are unaware of how to set up and run effective groups. HWS have developed a Best Practice Guide, which has evolved based upon feedback from our visits to practices, and national good practice. Furthermore, SCCG have committed to pay for one year's free membership for all practices to the National Association of Patient Participation (NAPP). HWS recommends SCCG follow up with all practices to ensure this funding has been taken up

Recommendation Four

- Each practice has now attested to (or is shortly due to) having a PPG, as part of its annual declaration to NHS England. There is an opportunity for SCCG to utilise PPGs to invigorate the participation, engagement and consultation methods across all five localities for specific commissioning changes such as Urgent Care, as well as receiving ongoing feedback from existing media such as the Health Forum.



7. Appendices

Appendix One

Younger Persons and PPGs Report: Due to the size of this report, this appendix is provided as a separate document and can also be accessed via the HWS website: www.healthwatchesunderland.com

Appendix Two

Younger Persons and PPGs Leaflet: Due to the size of this report, this appendix is provided as a separate document.

Appendix Three

Best Practice Guide: Due to the size of this report, this appendix is provided as a separate document and can also be accessed via the HWS website: www.healthwatchesunderland.com