

Patient Participation Group activity March - June 2020

Supporting surgeries and patients
during Covid-19



July 2020

Background

During May 2020 Healthwatch Oxfordshire contacted all Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) in Oxfordshire to hear how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on their activity. They were asked to complete a simple online survey. This report outlines the findings of this survey.

Of the 71 PPGs contacted 18 completed the online survey.

Only 5 of the respondents were still meeting, they used virtual tools e.g. Zoom or MS Teams.

- A PPG commented that *“no-one from the surgery attended meeting but the manager did send us a report and there has been a very small amount of correspondence with our secretary”*
- The Banbury PPGs representing the 3 largest practices and the Primary Care Network have online Zoom meetings every 2 weeks
- A PPG will be using Microsoft Teams for holding their AGM

Supporting practices

Most PPGs (10) were still in touch with their surgery using email, telephone, and in Bicester all three practices and PPGs met via Zoom.

A minority (6) of PPGs who responded were still supporting their practice.

This was due to different circumstances - some PPGs were unable to continue to support practices due to self-isolation / shielding by members, others had their offer of help declined by the practice.

Examples of support to practices by PPGs during the coronavirus pandemic included:

- PPG Chair sending a guidance letter out to the PPG members and offering it to the GP practice to use for patients this included thanks to staff, how to access alternative medical advice including Covid-19 self-isolation and not to ‘stockpile’ medication.
- Another PPG helped by investigating different locations that could be used for health visitor and antenatal services. Consequently, the practice and possible location worked together to develop the option.

“We are very actively involved in the “Help Hub” that has been established, and this certainly helps the surgery, but we are providing no direct support’

- Feeding back concerns and what information about the surgery and Covid-19 patients want to see on the practice website

“We have feedback concerns and advised on the web site and what patients need to know. We are reviewing communication and actively promoting the newsletter in local papers etc’

- One PPG reviewed communication from the GP surgery to patients and actively promoting the newsletter locally
- Some PPGs are checking in with their GP team to offer encouragement as well as sending cards, flowers, cakes, and fruit baskets

PPGs communicating with patients

PPGs continue to utilise different ways of communicating with their members including email (3), notice in surgeries and via the practice website. Other methods included using local newsletters, local papers, and village websites.

Several PPGs reported that there was no contact between them and patients since the coronavirus outbreak.

GP practices communicating with patients

Text messages and via the practice website were the most common forms of communication between practice and patient identified by the respondents. Other forms of communication included:

- Telephone calls were made by a GP surgery to patients
- Practice nurses contacting patients who received the Government guidance letters for the extremely vulnerable patients. Since sending the letter nurses have been contacting all these patients to ensure they know what is available for them and how they should seek help should they need to.
- Surgery Facebook pages have been kept up to date with information for those with access to social media, as well as helpful information about a dispensary which is attached to the Surgery.
- Newsletters sent to all patients with registered mail

One PPG Chair reported a concern that some patients had not received any communication from their GP Surgery since the end of March.

PPGs and Primary Care Networks

Seven of respondents are working with other PPGs in their Primary Care Network. The PPGs in the North appeared more active than other areas.

GP practice changes during Covid-19

The biggest change to surgery services reported is that many patients before a visit to their GP surgery are triaged first over the telephone. This is then usually followed up by either a telephone or video consultation with a GP, some commented that it was felt that there was a more direct discussion with the GP or practice nurse who is was felt are also playing a crucial role. Online consults are also now being used more widely.

Some surgeries have become Coronavirus Assessment Hubs.

The number of requests for patients to attend the surgery for non Covid-19 issues has fallen significantly in recent weeks was a comment received from one PPG.

GPs going to considerable lengths to solve problems that have developed since the start of the pandemic.

Existing patients who had been offered social prescribing are being telephone called by the Social Prescribing services on a regular basis. Many live alone and could be suffering more than most in the lockdown.

Testing using a gazebo in the car park.

Doctors and staff working at home.

Concerns heard from patients

A few comments received highlighted the difficulty for those where speech is affected; patients who are deaf, have had strokes or have a mental or physical disability are unable to use telephone consultations effectively but it is all that is offered most of the time to discuss symptoms there was also mention that some surgery staff were not following social distancing rules.

That no new patients are receiving Social Prescribing.

Uncertainty and worry about the information on the pandemic outcomes, risks etc. To some extent patients may be "switching off" and not listening or indeed understanding all of the information being published by all forms of Government and media.

Prescriptions mainly and worry about going into hospital or approaching GP for non Covid-19 symptoms. Mental health issues and CV seen as the only game in town.

Patients not happy with Advance Care Planning calls and being asked wishes without prior warning.

PPGs pride in action

GPs have listened to them and made changes to their website, produced newsletters for their patients explaining Covid-19.

Getting involved in local community action around support for vulnerable patients during the pandemic.

Writing regularly in the parish newsletters to help support and communicate with patients.