

The Thornton Practice

Date: 20 January 2025

Time: 10.00-12:00



Disclaimer: This report relates only to the service viewed at the time of the visit and is only representative of the views of the staff, visitors and patients who met members of the Enter and View team on that date.

Contact Details

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Registered Manager:

Amy Sissons (Practice Business Partner)

Date and Time of our Visit:

Date: 20 January 2025

Time: 10:00-12:00

Healthwatch Lancashire Authorised Representatives:

Sue Edwards (Senior Engagement Officer)

John Moore (Healthwatch Lancashire Volunteer)



Introduction

Healthwatch Lancashire is the independent public voice for health and social care in Lancashire and exists to make services work for the people who use them. We believe that the best way to do this is by providing the people of Lancashire with opportunities to share their views and experiences.

Healthwatch Lancashire has statutory powers to listen, act, challenge and gather feedback to improve Local Services and promote excellence throughout the NHS and social care services.

To help achieve this Healthwatch has a statutory power to 'Enter and View' health and social care services that are publicly funded. The purpose of an Enter and View is to listen to people who access those services and observe service delivery.

Following the Enter and View visit a report is compiled identifying aspects of good practice within the service visited, along with any recommendations for possible areas of improvement.

As we are an independent organisation we do not make judgements or express personal opinions but rely on feedback received and objective observations of the environment. The report is sent to the service provider providing an opportunity to respond to any recommendations and comments before being published on the Healthwatch Lancashire website at:

www.healthwatchlancashire.co.uk

The report is available to members of the public along with the Care Quality Commission, Healthwatch England and any other relevant organisations. Where appropriate Healthwatch Lancashire may arrange a revisit to monitor the progress of improvements and celebrate any further successes.

General Information

The Thornton Practice has approximately 13,000 registered patients including patients in local nursing/care homes and those who may be housebound.

Services include GPs and GP assistants, practice nurses, advanced nurse practitioners, practice pharmacists, paramedics, healthcare assistants, social prescribers, care coordinators, district nurses and midwifery. In partnership with Blackpool Teaching Hospital the practice has access to a community clinic and minor Treatments room. The practice is also a GP training centre.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Lancashire would like to thank patients, staff and management for making us feel welcome and for taking the time to speak to us during the visit.

What did we do?

Healthwatch Lancashire Enter and View Representatives made an announced visit to The Thornton Practice on 20 January 2025 and received feedback from:



Pre-visit practice survey

Healthwatch Lancashire emailed a pre-visit questionnaire to the practice business partner to learn about the patient population, services offered and how the surgery manages appointments for patients. Information from this questionnaire is included in the summary below.

Introductory meeting with Practice Business Partner

At the beginning of the enter and view visit Healthwatch Lancashire met with the practice business partner to discuss the surgery and to view the facilities. It was explained to the Healthwatch Lancashire representatives that appointments can be booked via the phone, the NHS app or the online app Patches.

One to one discussions with patients and their relatives

Healthwatch Lancashire spoke with patients about their experiences including appointment booking, how they felt about the service and the care and treatment delivered by the staff at the surgery.

Discussions with members of staff

Healthwatch Lancashire Representatives spoke with members of staff about their experiences of delivering services to patients. Questions centred around support for patients and any improvements staff felt could be made at the surgery.

Observations

Observations were made throughout the visit. This included patient and staff interactions, accessibility measures in place throughout the surgery and the condition and cleanliness of the facilities.

Summary



The Thornton Practice team were found to be welcoming of a proposed visit by Healthwatch Lancashire. A pre-visit questionnaire was completed and returned by the practice business partner prior to the visit, offering extensive information and allowing for the Healthwatch Lancashire team to be fully prepared for the visit

On arrival Healthwatch Lancashire representatives were warmly greeted by the practice team, and preliminary discussions allowed for the gathering of further information about the practice and services offered.

Thirteen patients and fourteen staff members provided feedback about The Thornton Practice.

Services provided at the practice include GPs, practice nurses, advanced nurse practitioners, practice pharmacists, healthcare assistants, care coordinators, district nurses and midwifery. The practice also has access to a community clinic and further community services, including social prescribing and cancer care, through the Torentum Primary Care Network.

Overall patients were positive about their quality of care and felt listened to. Staff were described as helpful and approachable. Digital access to make appointments was raised as requiring improvement by patients, along with more continuity of care. The practice team have already identified digital access as a need and recently ran a campaign to raise awareness of their digital platforms and are supporting patients to access these.

Staff felt that the practice was sufficiently staffed, other than when sick leave can reduce staffing levels. All stated that they are able to provide person-centred care, with several talking about going 'above and beyond'. All staff spoken with felt well supported, were praising of their colleagues and felt that practice management team looked after their mental wellbeing.

The disabled toilet in the waiting area was identified as needing some improvement in order to make sure that it is more dementia and visually impaired friendly. As The Thornton Practice leases the building along with The Village Practice this would need to be a joint undertaking between the two practices.

The practice has an active Patient Participation Group (PPG) and are actively working to increase numbers and diversify the group by way of banners and notice boards in the wating rooms.

Practice Overview



The Thornton Practice is located within Thornton Medical Centre, on Church Road in the town of Thornton-Cleveleys.

The medical centre is situated in a modern, purpose built, two storey building which incorporates two GP practices: The Thornton Practice and The Village Practice. There is also a Community Clinic located in the building; this is shared between the two local GP

practices and community services. A pharmacy which also shared the building has recently closed and the unit remains vacant.

Patient services by the practice are all located on the ground floor level with only offices located on the first floor. Waiting areas are shared between The Thornton Practice and The Village Practice. The Community Clinic is separate from the GPs section and has its own waiting area.

The Thornton Practice is part of the Torentum Primary Care Network (PCN), which includes three practices in the Thornton-Cleveleys area: The Thornton Practice, The Cleveleys Group Practice, and The Crescent Surgery. This PCN includes approximately 33,500 patients and allows for the sharing of services such as social prescribing, cancer support and mental health support.

The Thornton Practice offers evening and weekend appointments as part of their extended access service through the PCN at Cleveleys Health Centre. Information about opening times was easily found on The Thornton Practice website, as well as in their Practice Booklet.

Patients can also access same day healthcare at the Same Day Health Centre at the Fleetwood Health and Wellbeing Centre and the Walk-in Centre at Whitegate Health Centre, Blackpool.

There is good road access with on-site parking including disabled parking spaces. Street parking is also available, although due to the proximity of the medical centre to Thornton town centre spaces can be limited. There is good public transport to the area with regular buses, and there are bus stops directly outside the health centre. A taxi rank is also located to the front of the health centre.

Surgery Population



The practice currently has approximately 13,000 registered patients, and demographics are. "...similar to the national average with a slightly increase prevalence of Over 75's" (The Thornton Practice). There are also several nursing home and care homes in the Thornton Cleveleys area.

Appointment Management



Appointments can be made by telephone or online via the NHS app. Patients can also book via the practice website through the digital system Patch's. The practice is encouraging and supporting patients to access digital booking and recently ran a campaign to help patients who may not be digital savvy to learn how to use the online system. Appointments can be booked up to seven days in advance, and this includes out of hours appointments with The

Cleveleys Health Centre.

There are eight non-clinical Patient Advisors who triage calls and book appointments. There is also a Medicines Management team who take medication ordering and enquiries, with three prescription clerks, a pharmacy technician and practice pharmacists on hand to advise as and when necessary. GPs are also accessible for the patient advisors to consult with when dealing with patient queries.

On arrival patients can check-in themselves using an electronic screen located within the main waiting room. When using the electronic check-in patients are informed of which room they will be seen in and can therefore choose the appropriate waiting area to sit in. Patients were also observed using the reception desk on arrival.

Healthwatch Lancashire representatives were asked to sign in/out as visitors and were provided with a visitors badge demonstrating good security and safeguarding.

Enter and View observations

External Environment

The medical centre is easily identifiable, with good signage on Church Road. The carpark is of a good size and appeared neat and well maintained. There are disabled car spaces available, as well as an ambulance bay. Parking in the carpark was seen to be challenging due to the carpark being full on arrival, however this is out of the control of The Thornton Practice.

Entry into the building is via the main entrance on Church Road and to the rear via the carpark. Both entrances are easily identifiable, and access into the building is level with the external landscaping, providing good accessibility for wheelchair users and those with poor mobility. Entrance doors were



automatic and sufficiently wide enough to allow for easy access.

The building appears in good repair, and established planting is seen around the perimeter of the carpark giving a pleasant green feel to the site.

Internal Environment and Waiting Areas

The reception desk is easily identifiable and clearly distinguishable from The Village Practice reception desk. Throughout the visit the reception team were observed to be busy but handling patient flow professionally and effectively. The reception desk was of one overall height and would benefit from a lower section for wheelchair users (Recommendation 1), although it is acknowledged that this would incur a cost and may not be feasible at this moment in time.

Several waiting areas are located within the medical centre. It was explained to Healthwatch Lancashire representatives that on check-in patients are informed of the consultation room they will be using and can therefore opt to sit in the closest waiting space for their appointment. The waiting rooms are shared with The Village Practice and when speaking with patients it was noted that patients from both practices were intermingled. All waiting areas were clean and well maintained, with varied seating types to account for individual needs and preference.





The centre mainly consists of consultation rooms leading off from the waiting areas and corridors. The corridors are spacious, well-lit and with clear signage, although it was noted that more dementia friendly signs, especially for the toilets, would be helpful. It is recommended that the practice carry out a dementia friendly audit to ensure suitable signage and features are put in place (Recommendation 2).

Corridors and waiting areas were seen to be dementia friendly with contrasting colours, plain flooring and good lighting.

All patient services were located on the ground level, with offices on the first level. These were separated from patient areas by secure 'staff only' doors and stairs which helps maintain safeguarding and data protection.

Accessibility was observed to have been considered throughout the surgery, and there was sufficient room for those in wheelchairs, using mobility aids etcetera to move around freely. Handrails along the main corridors may help with mobility for those unsteady on their feet or with visual impairments (Recommendation 3).



A disabled toilet is available for all visitors to the health centre, accessed via one of the waiting areas. The room looked in need of some refurbishment, with lower toilet paper and hand towels dispensers needed, as well as toilet risers and contrasting colours for the toilet seats. This would improve accessibility those with further needs (Recommendation 4).

Flooring and tile colours in the disabled toilet are dark and could cause confusion for those with dementia/Alzheimer's, as well as for people with visual impairments. It is recommended that this is looked at as part of the recommended dementia audit discussed above.

It should be noted that toilets are shared between practices and the building is leased so it would be unreasonable to expect The Thornton Practice to take sole responsibility for this.

There is a British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation service available via Prestige, and this also includes interpretation services for patients for whom English is not their first language.

A quiet room is available for anyone requiring space for confidential, sensitive conversations, and for those who may have dementia/Alzheimer's, autism, or other long-term conditions and who may benefit from a less stimulating environment whilst waiting for their appointment.

In the main waiting area there is a 'Period Angel' corner where there are female sanitary products available which can be picked up for free by anyone accessing the health centre. This initiative is to be commended.

Surgery and health information was displayed throughout the communal spaces including a dedicated information board and banner about the Patient Participation Group (PPG).



The Healthwatch Lancashire poster announcing the visit was clearly displayed in several locations around the practice.

Patient Interactions



On arrival Healthwatch Lancashire representatives observed a busy reception desk; reception staff were observed to be knowledgeable, helpful and had an approachable manner.

There was a steady flow of people coming in and out but there was a calm atmosphere, and staff demonstrated good understanding of individual needs and requirements. All staff observed were professional, friendly and efficient.

Patients were called into their appointment by the GP or practitioner who collected the patient from the waiting areas. They were observed being patient with those who had poor mobility and supporting patients to the consultation rooms.

Patient Involvement



The website for The Thornton Practice was easy to use with information around services, the practice team and health and wellbeing advice.

The practice has a Patient Welcome book which offers extensive information around services, opening hours, freedom to information, the Patient Participation Group (PPG), Patient Transport, Patch's and how to order prescriptions.

The Thornton Practice also has its own regular printed newsletter which offers news and information such as around the triage process, patient feedback, services and health and wellbeing information. The local 'Your Community Matters' newsletter is also used by the practice to share information with the local community.

At the time of the visit the practice had an active Patient Participation Group (PPG). A banner was on display in the waiting area and there is a dedicated notice board on display.



Patient feedback

Healthwatch Representatives spoke with thirteen patients during the visit. One patient was called into their appointment after answering a few questions and preferred not to continue with the conversation following their appointment.

How did you make your appointment today?

Eight patients stated that they had made their appointment via telephone, three stated that the practice had called them. A nurse practitioner had called one patient to arrange a health check, and one patient had their appointment made by the clinical staff member at a previous visit as part of on-going treatment.

Overall satisfaction around making appointments was mixed:

"Yes, it's always fairly easy"

"Today it was OK, it was very quiet, it isn't normally that way."

"Even at 8:00am it was busy. I tried a few times, but managed to get an appointment in the end"

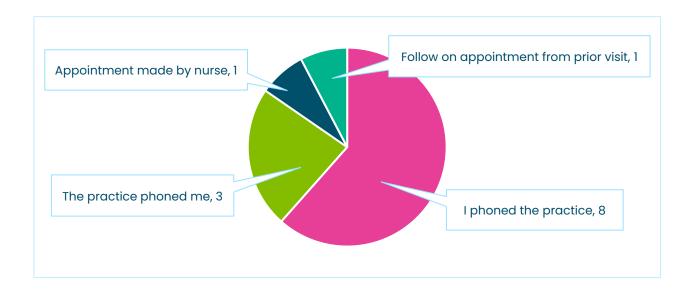
One patient stated that they had used callback and found this worked well for them "There was a small queue, I used call back. There was a small wait, I had a good conversation with the surgery. They asked appropriate questions and then responded as I hoped that they would".

Two patients talked about preferring online booking but hadn't been able to utilise this:

"It was easier to do when it was available online"

"You can't do it online. That used to be good."

The practice recently carried out a campaign to promote online appointment booking and support patients to use digital platforms, therefore it is clear that there has been a recognised need around this which the practice team have addressed. It is recommended that this is continued to be promoted through all forms of media including the practice website, newsletter and the Your Community Matters booklet to ensure that all patients are reached (Recommendation 5).



Waiting times in the medical centre varied with one patient stating that they had been there over 20 minutes whist others were called in quite quickly. This could be due to the nature of their appointments and who they were waiting to see. Some patients spoken with had been made aware that the GP's were running behind by approximately ten minutes.

"I've been here for twenty five minutes; that's twenty minutes overdue. The delay wasn't supposed to be that long"

"Only five minutes, the wait is rarely long"

Other comments included:

"I'm just glad that I could get a same day appointment"

Do you feel that you receive care and treatment that meets your needs?

Overall the patients who responded to this question were positive about the care that they receive at The Thornton practice.

"All is pretty good. They listen to what you say and act on it."

"Always been great"

"They've been very helpful right from joining"

Practice staff were discussed as helpful, approachable and friendly

"The staff have a good supportive and caring attitude"

"The nurses and the assistants have been very good. The receptionists are very helpful too"

Is there anything that can be changed to meet your needs?

Patients were forthcoming with several suggestions on how the practice can meet their needs more:

"It's disappointing that the GP app isn't available for appointments. Technology use needs to be extended, there needs to be a better appetite for its use. I want to be able to upload symptoms, etc."

"It's outdated for the doctors to come out of their rooms and shout your name. I struggle to hear and easily miss who is next. A display board with the name of the person would help a lot" (Recommendation 6)

"The triage can be difficult to manage. It can seem too in depth when you are unwell and just want to see a doctor"

More GPs was raised as something that would help speed up access to appointments by one patient. Continuity of care by way of seeing the same GP was seen as important by several patients, and one patient commented that GPs don't always read their patient notes in advance of the appointment meaning that time is spent bringing the GP up to speed.

"The doctors don't always read your notes in advance of seeing you"

Do you receive information from the surgery that is easy to understand?

Two patients preferred not to/were unable to answer this question, and one patient had been called in to their appointment. Nine patients who provided feedback to this question were satisfied with how information is received.

"Whenever we do it's always clear"

"It's clear. Phone calls, texts or emails are all good"

One patient felt that they needed more advice from the GP "The doctor just asked me what I wanted rather than telling me what he advised"

Do you know how to make a complaint if needed?

Two patients preferred not to/were unable to answer this question, and one patient had been called in to their appointment. Four patients stated that they did

not know how to make a complaint. Several patients were unsure and said that they would ring or speak to reception staff to find out how to raise a complaint should the need arise. Four patients stated that they would ask to see the practice manager.

"Probably not, I'd phone the practice to enquire"

"I'd go to the practice manager first, then escalate if necessary"

"Yes, I have a leaflet"

Do you know what a Patient Participation Group (PPG) is?

Three patients were aware of the PPG, seven said that they were not aware and three patients preferred not to answer/had been called into their appointment at the time of this question. As the practice is already actively promoting the PPG both in the health centre and through their newsletters etc. it is felt that recommendations to raise patient awareness would be unreasonable at this point.

"Yes, I do, though I don't want to join in"

Staff feedback

Healthwatch spoke to six members of the staff team during the visit, and eight staff provided written feedback. Staff spoken with were in differing roles including clinical and non-clinical. Staff were observed interacting well with patients and appeared to be confident in their roles.

Do you have enough staff when on duty?

Thirteen members of staff who provided feedback felt that overall the surgery was sufficiently staffed, one staff member felt that staff levels due to sickness could be challenging at time. It should be noted that at the time of the visit the practice had experienced high levels of sickness due to flu, COVID and the Norovirus which was at a unusually high level nationally and therefore unavoidable for the surgery.

"Most of the time yes, sometimes a bit thin on the ground due to sickness"

"Pretty good with flexibility... some staff trained on various roles"

"Yes, plenty of staff, numbers are always perfect"

Do you feel supported to carry out a person-centred experience?



All staff members who provided feedback felt that overall they were able to provide person-centred care; with time constraints and appointment availability being raised as the key barriers.

"Yes, appointments are based on patient needs"

"We pride ourselves on it, and try to go above and beyond"

"Massively, 100%"

All staff felt supported by their colleagues and the medical centre management team.

"Very much an open door policy"

"GPs will always pick up the phone if we need help"

Having coffee breaks together was raised as a positive, allowing staff to connect with each other and ensure that they are one overall team "We are The Thornton Practice Family"

Do you feel you have enough training to carry out your duties well?

Overall staff felt that they are sufficiently trained in order to be able to carry out their duties well, and that they can request further training if it would be of benefit to their role. One staff member who provided feedback felt that it could be a bit reactive at time rather than proactive.

"Yes, there are multiple training opportunities available..."

"Most of the time, a lot of my work is reactive"

"Yes, and if there is anything I'm unsure about other staff members are always happy to help"

What measures are there in place for people with disabilities such as people with physical impairments or who are Deaf?



The benefits of all patient services being located on the ground floor was mentioned by several members of staff. Patient access to hearing loops, wheelchairs and mobility aids, and disabled access were all discussed by staff as being in place for patients with a disability.

Several staff members spoke about how the practice has alerts on their patient records system which enables staff to identify where extra support may be

required for individual needs such as for those who have visual/hearing impairments, autism, dementia etcetera; and can therefore ensure patients are supported accordingly. Staff discussed how identifying individual needs at the appointment booking stage allows for better planning such as allowing for longer appointments and making the necessary adjustments.

One staff member felt that the practice is proactive in supporting both patients and staff who may have accessibility needs.

Discussion with the practice staff determined that there are interpreters available for British Sign Language (BSL) via the Prestige Language Line. Interpreters are also available for those whom English is a second language.

Quiet rooms are available for those who may find the general waiting areas overwhelming, and consultations were being carried out in the most appropriate space for the individual.

"Alerts added to patient records so that clinical staff are aware before seeing the patient so adjustments can be made".

"Staff can provide wheelchairs at the surgery to transfer patients from car park to clinic rooms".

What is your experience of working here?

All members of staff who provided feedback were positive about their experience of working at the surgery. Working as a team and support from both managers and colleagues was raised as a positive, as was the fact that they are seen to look after everyone's mental health by way of support and hosting staff social events, such as a barbeque. Management and business partners were mentioned throughout the conversations as being supportive, helpful and approachable.

"I love working at The Thornton Practice"

"We all work as one, everyone helps everyone..."

"The clinical staff go over and above for their patients"

All staff who provided feedback said that they would recommend the practice to a close relative "would recommend 100%".

Are there any changes that can be made to improve the patient experience?

Four members of staff discussed how they are at capacity and felt that there was a need for more appointments in order to accommodate a growing practice "...l wish that there were more appointments available for patients in general practice as a whole... are seeing more patients than ever but with the same number of clinicians and appointment slots...". It should be noted that this is not a localised

issue and that further funding would be required to increase services offered by The Thornton Practice.

One member of staff talked about how referrals into secondary care can cause frustrations and often gets referred back to them; although it was recognised that this is a general NHS system issue rather than the GP practice.

The need for more seating was raised by one staff member "some overcrowding in waiting areas sometimes". As there are two GP practices utilising the waiting areas this is something that would require further discussion and collaboration between The Thornton Practice and The Village Practice (Recommendation 7).

One member of staff suggested that the reception desk could be utilised more "I feel more could be done at reception...".

Other comments:

"We have a whole team of amazing people"

"I think the surgery offers a high standard of care..."

"This place has been my rock..."

"Patient expectations and demands are more... understand patient frustrations"

"Always looking to make things easier, smarter etc."



Recommendations

The following recommendations have been formulated based on observations of the environment and feedback gathered from patients and staff.

- 1. Look at lowering one section of the reception desk to enable better access for wheelchair users
- 2. Carry out a dementia friendly audit, possibly with those who have lived experience, to identify how the practice can be fully dementia friendly
- 3. Consider handrails in corridors to help with patients who may have mobility issues and/or visual impairments
- 4. Look at how the disabled toilet could be improved with lower toilet paper and hand towel dispensers, toilet risers and contrasting toilet seat etc. Replace the dark flooring and tiles. This should be based on the dementia audit findings in recommendation 2, and would need to be in collaboration with The Village Practice
- 5. Continue to raise patient awareness around digital access and ensure that this is communicated in various methods to ensure that all patients are aware and can access support if required
- 6. Carry out investigation into patients preferred methods of being called into appointments such as verbally and/or via a digital screen to ensure full accessibility for those who may be hard of hearing/deaf. The PPG can support with this
- 7. Consider how further seating or seating arrangements could be improved. This would need to be in collaboration with The Village Practice due to the waiting areas being shared spaces
- 8. Share this report with patients via digital platforms and/or other methods in order to highlight current good practice and allow for patients to be fully informed of where actions will be carried out

Provider response

Recommendation	Action from provider	Timeframe	Comments
Accessibility: Consider having a lower section of the reception desk for easier interactions with wheelchair users	Refit of Reception will be considered as part of the Business Improvement Plan; however this will have to be a joint project with the other Practice who shares our building and reception area, The Village Practice.	3 Years	Finances are very very constrained within General Practice and any modifications to the building are at the Practice's expense and not the landlords. The financial challenges being faced by the Practice, particularly with the increases
Look at adding handrails in the main corridors	This will be taken to the landlord for consideration for them to install.	12 months	in National Insurance and National Minimum wage are having significant effects on the affordability of improvement projects over delivering patient care. This imminent challenge will
Carry out a dementia friendly audit to identify where improvements can be made	Audit will be conducted, and affordable adaptations will be implemented	6 months	therefore extend the timeframe for when such improvements can be made.
Look at how the disabled toilet can be improved to be more accessible and dementia friendly	Audit will be conducted, and affordable adaptations will be implemented	6 months	
Work with the PPG to identify the most accessible/appropriate methods for calling patients into appointments, such as digital monitors	With the building having shared waiting rooms with multiple services including another GP practice, unfortunately digital monitors are not an option for a call in system as they have to	6 months	

	be linked to the clinical systems of which we work on separate systems due to Data Protection. We will take to PPG meetings to see if we would be able to find alternative options		
Digital access: Continue to raise awareness of digital access and support patients to access online appointment booking	Bi-Monthly face to face Digital Access sessions are planned for the remainder of the year for patients to come and meet with staff and PPG members on how to use and access NHS APP Long Term Conditions Nursing appointment digital booking links to be used for Annual reviews from April 25 increase online appointment booking for scheduled / planned appointments.	12 months	Quality Improvement project for this year is for Scheduled Care appointments to be booked digitally rather than via the telephone
Waiting areas: work with The Village Practice to identify if/how seating capacity could be increased	Added to the Building meeting agenda to look at options	3 months	
Good practice: Share this report with patients via digital platforms and/or other methods in order to highlight current good practice and allow for patients to be fully informed of where actions will be carried out	Report will be discussed with staff at next Practice Team training event in April 25 Report will be published on Practice Website Report will be discussed at the next PPG meeting	3 months	

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