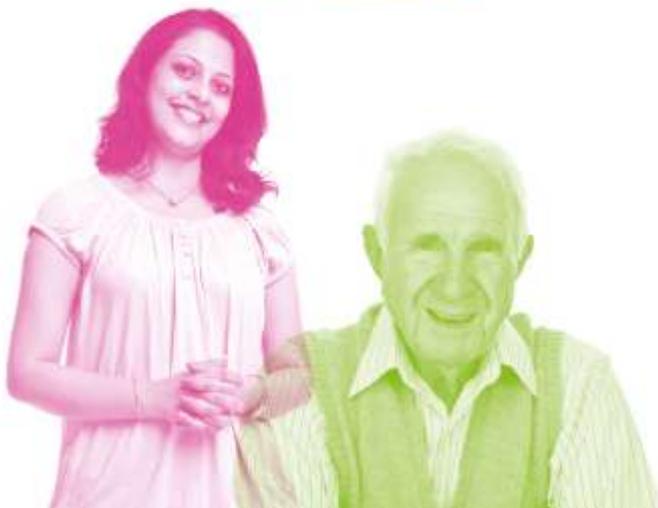


**A Healthwatch  
Merton guide to  
Patient Participation  
Groups (PPGs)**

FEBRUARY 2016



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## INTRODUCTION

Healthwatch is the consumer champion for health and social care in England. Here to give children, young people and adults a powerful voice - making sure their views and experiences are heard by those who run, plan and regulate health and social care services.

By making sure the views and experiences of all people who use services are taken into account, we can help make services better now and in the future. Healthwatch actively seeks views from all sections of the community, especially from those who sometimes struggle to be heard and not just from those who shout the loudest. We also encourage health and social care providers, regulators and planners to hear directly from people themselves.

Since April 2015, it has been a contractual requirement of NHS England for all GP practices to have a PPG and to make reasonable efforts for this to be representative of the practice population. Since this links with the aims of Healthwatch, we have developed this guide to help support new PPGs. We will also work with PPGs to continue to ensure that they remain a high quality resource for their practice and its other patients.

## PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP (PPG)

A Patient Participation Group (PPG) is a group of patients, carers and GP practice staff who meet to discuss practice issues and patient experience to help improve the service.

The purpose of a PPG is to give patients and practice staff the opportunity to meet and discuss topics of mutual interest: to provide a means for patients to become more involved and make suggestions about the healthcare services they receive; to explore solutions to ongoing issues highlighted by patient complaint data and patient surveys, to contribute to action plans and help monitor improvements; to contribute feedback to the practice on National Patient Survey results and Friends and Family Test feedback; to propose developments or change; to support health awareness and patient education.

## SETTING UP A PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP

A PPG is open to every patient on the GP practice list. All communities, groups, genders, ages, ethnicities, and disabilities representing the patient list are encouraged to join. There are no other membership requirements except that patients must be registered with the practice.

PPG members should as far as possible, be representative of the practice population. Healthwatch Merton can help to assist in the recruitment of patients by promoting the practice PPG.

It is important that a PPG is meaningful to both the patients and the practice staff, and there are various ways to work towards this that are specific to each PPG.

A GP and Practice Manager or equivalent should be part of the group. Without the support of both a clinician and a manager, the patient group will be unable to function effectively. The group must be supported with practice information, resources and authority to take action.

There is no fixed number for PPG members however there should be a limit put in place to allow for room capacity/logistics. It is best to start with 4-8 members who are able to commit and participate. If the practice is set up for it, there can be additional virtual members who participate through the website, email, telephone or post. Patients should also be encouraged to join the PPG mailing list so they can keep up-to-date with what is being discussed at PPG meetings.

PPG meetings can take place face-to-face or virtually, however Healthwatch Merton feel that best practice is to meet face-to-face at least four times a year. Practices may wish to also set up a virtual PPG in between these meetings.

#### Virtual PPG

- Practices can set up a virtual group for patients who want to contribute to improving services in the practice, but cannot attend face to face meetings.
- An email address specifically for PPG members can be set up, this can be used to communicate with patients and consult with them on a range of topics that affect the practice.
- The use of social media may be considered to communicate with a wider reach of patients.
- The PPG may wish to consider the use of Skype for meetings, or online group organisation tools such as Trello or Slack to keep track of various projects and contributions. Doodle can be used to help with scheduling dates and times for meetings and events.
- An agreed member of staff should be responsible for communicating with the virtual PPG and should ensure they have regular communication with the group, keeping them updated with any changes happening in the practice.

#### Top Tips:

- The practice staff should make sure that everyone in the group is clear about what is and what is not to be included in group discussions or actions.
- A Terms of Reference should be developed by the PPG and ground rules should be outlined in this.
- Meetings should be set for approximately 1.5 hours, unless PPG members have specifically requested more time.

- A PPG should meet within the GP practice at a time suitable for all patients - this could be afternoon or evening depending on what is agreed.
- The PPG should discuss constructive suggestions for improving the practice, and share concerns that could affect the wider practice population.
- PPGs should consider inviting health and voluntary professionals to PPG meetings from time to time, for PPG members to remain informed and updated about local opportunities for patients.
- PPG patient members cannot provide any medical advice to other patients, or deal with personal/medical issues or individual patient complaints during the meeting.
- Create a PPG page on the practice website and include minutes and dates of meetings, as well as how patients can get involved.
- Design a newsletter for the practice, to provide regular updates to patients.
- A designated PPG noticeboard space can help the PPG to communicate with the population using the practice about their projects and successes. A regularly updated 'You Said/We Did' section can make clear the link between patient input and actions taken by the Practice.
- Organise health awareness events - this could link in with awareness campaigns that other organisations are doing e.g. Breast Cancer awareness or the Clinical Commissioning Group's 'Yellow Man/Not Always A&E' campaign.
- PPG members should elect a Patient Chair after the first or second meeting.
- Consider choosing a yearly theme for the group to focus their work towards.

#### ***How to recruit PPG members:***

- Design a large poster advertising the PPG, and include details of what a PPG is (clearly stating the purpose), when they meet, and how to get involved.
- Practices with an electronic display can use it to advertise the PPG.
- Practice staff can help identify patients who might be interested, and approach them face to face to tell them about the group; they can also make sure new patients hear about it when they sign up.
- If you already have PPG members, some may be willing to spend an afternoon sitting in the practice, talking to patients in the waiting room and signing them up there and then.
- Make contact with your local Healthwatch to assist in telling people about your PPG.
- Local Healthwatch may be available to carry out engagement in the practice where they can promote the PPG as well as Healthwatch activities.
- Advertise the PPG at local community hub spaces (such as libraries and community centres) with posters.
- Have an open day with useful information on particular health topics for all interested patients to attend.
- Advertise the PPG using the text message service.

### ***What do patients get out of having a patient group?***

- The opportunity to be more involved with the practice.
- A chance to make suggestions and improve the practice.
- A means of ensuring that suggestions and common complaints are taken on board and necessary changes are being made.
- A way of finding out more about healthcare provision in the local area.
- Greater confidence by becoming a patient representative, having their voice heard and witnessing change happen when working as a part of a group.
- An opportunity to learn more about the NHS, GP Practices, and other ways to use their skills as a patient representative.
- Opportunity to serve the needs of other patients as a volunteer and gain experience of organising small projects

### ***What does the Practice get out of having a patient group?***

- Understanding of their patients' experiences and views, thus contributing to more satisfied patients and better run services.
- A patient group suggesting simple solutions that may not have been explored before.
- PPGs can encourage health education activities amongst patients and provide a more direct link into the community.
- A successful PPG can drive in additional income; this can contribute to developing services that will benefit patients and help to maintain the PPG itself.
- Patients can assist the Practice in making sure that its website and processes are patient friendly.

### ***What the Practice should provide:***

- A place to meet (usually in the Practice itself)
- A member of staff and a GP to attend each meeting
- Water, and possibly other refreshments
- Space to promote the PPG (either on the website, a noticeboard, or both)
- Printing of any documents needed for the meetings

## TERMS OF REFERENCE TEMPLATE

### Patient Participation Group (PPG) Terms of Reference

#### **Aim of the PPG**

The aim of this PPG is to develop a positive and constructive relationship between patients, the Practice and the community it serves, ensuring the Practice remains accountable and responsive to all its patients' needs.

#### **Name**

The name of the group is the Patient Participation Group (PPG) for the *[name of Practice]*

#### **Ground rules**

1. The PPG meeting is not a forum for individual complaints and personal issues.
2. Silence indicates agreement - speak up if you would like your suggestions to be a part of the discussion.
3. Open and honest communication applies to all.
4. All views are valid and will be listened to.
5. Be flexible, listen, ask for help and support each other.
6. No phones or other disruptions.
7. Respect the practice and patient confidentiality at all times.
8. Discrimination on any grounds will not be tolerated.
9. Demonstrate a commitment to delivering results as a group.
10. Start and finish meetings on time and stick to the agenda.

#### **Membership**

- The PPG is open to any patient over the age of sixteen registered with the practice
- It should be reflective of the patient demographic of the practice
- The minimum and maximum number of patients in the group is *[to be decided at first meeting; suggested size is between 4 and 12]*
- The PPG will elect a Chair to run meetings and guide the work of the group.
- To become a member patients must nominate themselves via one of a variety of communication channels decided by the PPG, which take account of accessibility needs *[process to be decided at first meeting]*
- Members will normally serve on the PPG for a period of two years but may step down at will. If there is a waiting list for spaces on the PPG then after two years' service, members will have to be voted in at the next AGM of the PPG.
- The PPG may appoint expert advisers where appropriate; for a fixed period of time.
- Members absent without notice from three consecutive meetings may be thought to have resigned, and could be replaced. Notice of absence must be sent to either the Chair or the Practice, who are then responsible for making apologies at the meeting.

- The PPG will list its members' names in newsletters, on the Practice website and on the notice board
- The officers of the PPG will be the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary. The Secretary position may rotate from meeting to meeting (this must be allocated at the end of each preceding meeting). Additional officers may be appointed at the PPG's discretion.
- During its first year, PPG officers will be selected from the members of the PPG by self-nomination and voting at PPG meetings. Thereafter, officers will be nominated by the PPG group and elected by majority vote at the AGM.
- Membership of the PPG is a voluntary unpaid position and does not confer any privileges beyond those already available to all practice patients.

## Objectives

In partnership with the practice, the PPG aims to:

- Act as an advisory group providing perspectives and concerns from patients that can influence how services operate at the practice.
- Seek patients' views and communicate areas of patient concern to the practice, with a view to influencing change.
- Act as a consultative group for any changes at the practice.
- To encourage and support the role of the practice in involving patients in their own care.
- Monitor comments received about the practice.
- Annually review the results of the patient survey and suggest changes as appropriate.
- Encourage and manage volunteering which supports the work of the practice.
- Facilitate links with voluntary groups and services within the community
- Provide up to date material for any PPG noticeboard and the PPG pages on the Practice website.

## Meetings

- The PPG will meet at least 4 times a year and these meeting dates will be set in advance.
- Members will send apologies in advance of the meeting if they are unable to attend.
- Practice staff will send apologies in advance of the meeting if they are unable to attend, allowing enough time for the meeting to be rescheduled if deemed necessary.
- A Practice GP, or deputy and whenever possible the Practice Manager will attend all PPG meetings to present news of developments within the practice and to respond to issues raised by the PPG.

- At the discretion of the Chair the GP can be requested to attend part or all of the meeting. Other staff of the Practice or other parties from outside the Practice may also attend by invitation.
- Copies of the minutes of meetings will be prepared by or sent to the Practice Manager for distribution to the practice staff and to be made available to patients on notice boards and through any other communication means deemed to be appropriate.
- An Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held which all patients can attend. Patients will be suitably notified of when this will occur. This will review membership, project work and activities undertaken by the PPG during the year. Where applicable it will also report on any income and expenditure of the PPG in the previous 12 months.
- Registered patients may attend PPG meetings as observers to ensure transparency of the operations of the group [*maximum number to be decided at first meeting*]

### **Commitment**

The Practice manager or delegated Practice Staff member will attend all meetings

The Practice will commit to: attending meetings of PPG; taking forward issues and recommendations from the PPG; supplying responses of action taken as a result; and will be party to decisions taken by the PPG.

The Practice will keep the PPG informed of service developments, and these will be brought for discussion at PPG meetings, which will include exploring how the wider practice population can get involved in these discussions.

PPG members will commit to attending meetings or contributing to meetings.

PPG members including Practice staff will commit and adhere to ground rules.

### **Communications**

- The PPG does not speak on behalf of the Practice or represent it.
- The PPG terms of reference will be available to any patient registered at the practice upon request to either the practice or the PPG.
- Minutes of the PPG meetings will be available to all patients of the practice, either via a PPG noticeboard in the waiting room or on the PPG pages of the website.

## **Amendments**

These Terms of Reference will be up for review annually to ensure that they are fit for purpose. They can also be modified at any meeting by unanimous decision of the PPG and representatives of the Practice if modifications are submitted as an agenda item in advance of the meeting.

## **Dissolution**

The PPG may be dissolved by self-determination if this was felt to be necessary by the group and by a majority vote at a special meeting or AGM. It may also be dissolved on closure of the Practice. In such an event, any cash belonging to the PPG will be used to benefit the patients. The PPG must do its best to notify all patients of the Practice of the intent to dissolve the group and provide a clear reason for the decision.

## AGENDA TEMPLATE FOR FIRST MEETING

[Name of Practice] PPG Meeting Agenda

[Meeting Place]

[Date of Meeting]

[Time of Meeting]

Item	Time:
1. Welcome and Introductions	e.g. 19:00
2. Agree Ground Rules	e.g. 19:05
3. Aims and Objectives of the PPG	(20 minutes?)
4. Amend Terms of Reference	(20 minutes?)
5. Update from the GP Practice (including any recent news, and any data about the practice's population/services/frequent user groups)	(15 minutes?)
6. Discuss potential roles for PPG members (including Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary)	(10 minutes?)
7. Action Plan for setting up the group (including communications and engagement of unrepresented demographics)	(10 minutes?)
8. Set dates for next two meetings	(5 minutes?)
9. AOB	(5 minutes?)
10. Close	e.g. 20:30

## AGENDA TEMPLATE FOR SECOND MEETING

[Name of Practice] PPG Meeting Agenda

[Meeting Place]

[Date of Meeting]

[Time of Meeting]

Item:	Time:
1. Apologies (and welcome any new members)	
2. Elect a Chair and other Officers	
3. Agree the amended Terms of Reference	
4. Agree the minutes of the last meeting	
5. Update from the GP practice	
6. Progress updates from members assigned actions	
7. Skills and links audit	
8. Action plan for first project/next quarter	
9. AOB	
10. Confirm date of next two meetings	
11. Close	

## AGENDA TEMPLATE FOR THIRD MEETING

[Name of Practice] PPG Meeting Agenda

[Meeting Place]

[Date of Meeting]

[Time of Meeting]

<b>Item:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
1. Apologies (and welcome any new members)	
2. Agree minutes of last meeting	
3. Updates on action plan items	
4. Update from the GP Practice	
5. Visiting speaker	
6. Action Plan for next quarter	
7. Dates for next two meetings	
8. AOB	
9. Close	

### *Getting going*

The initial meetings will run differently for each group, based on who comes to the meetings and what everyone's aims are for their PPG. You don't have to do everything at once; but the agenda templates provided should give you an idea of what to aim to achieve in your first few meetings.

The agendas provided are very full, and though you can spread things out over more meetings you might want to look at having slightly longer meetings to begin with; a few extra minutes per meeting now could help you get everything in place months earlier than if you spread out the things you need to do to get up and running.

### *First meeting*

This meeting is really about everyone getting to know each other and exploring the idea of what a PPG is. People might want to arrange to arrive early and have a cup of tea together so that the serious parts of the meeting can move along on schedule and everyone already feels comfortable talking with one another.

The agenda and Terms of Reference, plus any other documents should go out a week in advance; the time column on the agenda needs to say what time you plan on getting to that item. Both the agenda-setting and managing the meeting will probably be done by a temporary Chair, who might have to be a member of practice staff until the official Chair is elected at the second meeting. Someone will also need to take notes and write minutes until the PPG has an official Secretary.

At the introductions stage everyone might want to put forward what brought them to the PPG and what they want to get out of it (any skills they want to gain, or just what will bring them satisfaction out of playing a part in the PPG).

The ground rules could be exactly as they are in this guide, or you could write them yourselves in the meeting if you have someone who's good at facilitating group work.

Finding out what the aims and objectives of this particular PPG are can be useful for the group. A top tip is for the Practice to provide sticky notes, and each person can write down on separate squares of note paper the one or two aims which they want the PPG to focus on at first. You can look to the 'Objectives' section of the Terms of Reference to get ideas, but you might already have something new which you really want to do. This way, everyone's thoughts and ideas can be stuck on the wall and arranged by theme to see where people's areas of interest match. It's a good way to see if the patients and the Practice are focussing on the same aims as well. This doesn't mean the aims are decided now, but it starts a discussion.

Everyone should have been sent a draft Terms of Reference at least a week in advance of the meeting, and made notes of anything they think could do with changing. The group can discuss these ideas and someone will make notes of what needs to be added or changed. Then they could be agreed straight away if enough people are at the meeting and want to sign them off, or a new amended version can be sent out to be agreed at the next meeting.

Some things in the Terms of Reference will definitely need to be discussed and tailored to fit your PPG: the maximum size of the group, the process for taking membership applications, and the maximum number of non-member 'observers' who can be present at each meeting. It's also worth discussing if the group needs to have an Annual General Meeting (AGM); not all PPGs will think this is suitable for them and you may want to rewrite the Terms so that they don't mention it.

The practice staff at the meeting will need to prepare a little beforehand, to give the patient members some idea of the current form of the practice. Any data about the registered population will help with planning how to make the group representative enough; information about particular health problems in the area might help generate ideas for projects. This is also a good time to share any successes, or talk about changes which are planned or in progress.

You might not elect a Chair, Secretary, or any other position at the very first meeting; particularly if the group starts off small. It is a good idea to talk about the roles and what they involve so that people can think about putting themselves forward at the next meeting. There is a guide to the different roles later in this pack, and you can print this off and use it to help you talk about what skills people will need to be effective Officers for your PPG. You might want to talk about other roles you think you will need at this stage too. You can also find out more about how to organise a committee at [www.diycommitteeguide.org](http://www.diycommitteeguide.org)

Even at the first meeting it's a good idea to set a few actions and allocate them. Typing up the minutes will be one of them. If you found that the people at the meeting didn't represent the demographics of the Practice population then you might want to decide some things you can do to attract people from the groups you are missing before the next meeting. You might want to advertise for a Chair too if it looks like no-one is interested so far. If there is time, talking about what ways the PPG is going to be able to communicate consistently with each other and the rest of the patients is very useful; can you agree on a place to have a noticeboard, whether it makes sense to set up social media accounts, how soon you will be able to have a page on the Practice website, and who will set any of these up?

Set dates for the next two meetings in advance so that members can prioritise attending them when they are managing their diaries. Consider varying the times at which meetings are held, so that people who have other responsibilities don't miss out on the chance to participate.

It is probably too early for anyone to have Any Other Business (AOB) but someone might have something which they want raised on the next agenda.

### ***Second meeting***

The aim of the second meeting is to get a working structure for the group. This can change and develop, but a few decisions need to be made if the group wants to start operating and not lose momentum.

Anyone who can't make the meeting should have sent notice in advance, these apologies are given at the beginning so that everyone knows they still intend to be a part of the group.

It would be best practice to elect at least a Chair and Secretary at this meeting, as it will help the group to run more smoothly. Likewise, unless something very important is missing from the new amended Terms of Reference, or the group is really struggling to get a decent amount of members attending, the Terms of Reference should have their final notes added and be agreed at this meeting.

Everyone should have had the minutes of the last meeting sent to them in advance to check through and refresh their memory. Agreeing the minutes just means that everyone thinks the notes are accurate, you don't have to discuss each item again. Anything which isn't a correct representation should be changed.

It's good to have a space in every meeting for the GP and members of Practice staff who are present to give any updates on things they have mentioned before, or on new developments at the practice. This might be very quick, or they may even have nothing to report this time.

Anyone who was assigned an action last time needs to say what progress they have made with it, or what has held them back. Other members might have useful suggestions or be able to help. Any actions not completed need to be carried forward to the next meeting.

Hopefully there are a good number of members now, and the group can begin to look at its assets. The skills and connections which members have are a key part of what will make it successful, and it's very helpful to look methodically at what each member brings to the group; you can also make a list of skills which you think you need to add (for instance social media skills) and that will help to make plans for either getting a member with those skills or encouraging a present member to develop them.

The easiest way to do an audit is for everyone to write down all the skills they have from other areas of their life on one side of paper, and all the groups or organisations they are connected to on the other side; then everyone swaps papers and reads someone else's out. Making a big list of everything together and keeping it up to date can be an action for someone after the meeting.

By now the group might have had some discussions which indicate projects they would be interested in the PPG taking on. A common one to start with is a consultation of as many practice patients as possible, since this also raises the profile of the PPG and lets people know that it is active; even PPGs who choose to start this way will want to discuss what things they plan to consult on and why those are relevant. Now could be the time to start that conversation, but it might have to wait until the next meeting if you're near to the agreed end of the meeting.

### ***Third meeting***

By the third meeting you should have a structure which you are trying out, including some Officers and a Terms of Reference which sets out how the group is put together and operates. This meeting should be used to decide on your first project and talk about how you are going to achieve it.

If you want to, you might invite a visiting speaker to come and talk to you about a certain health issue, or something which is going on locally or nationally which members want to know more about. Healthwatch are very happy to visit PPGs and talk about work that we are doing to represent patients and the public, and might be able to give you advice about any problems you are having in getting your PPG to work well.

### ***Future meetings***

It's a good idea for members to try to keep up to date on various healthcare related issues, and to bring their findings to the group. Getting new visiting speakers every so often can be helpful as well.

PPG members might also want to think about networking; either with other PPGs to learn about different ways of approaching things, or with charities and voluntary organisations who provide health-related services so that the PPG can link them with the Practice, or even with other places where the voice of patients needs to be heard such as NICE, or the CCG Patient Engagement Group. Reporting back from networking activities can be done under an 'Updates from Members' item on the agenda at each meeting.

Any PPG which is attempting an ambitious project which will need a lot of discussion might want to think about having a project sub-group which meets more frequently or communicates in a different format and then reports to the core PPG at the quarterly meetings.

## ROLES FOR PPG MEMBERS

### Chair

Guides the meetings to keep things productive.

- Manages/creates the agenda; allocating space to items which are agreed in the previous meeting to need further discussion, or anything very significant which arises between meetings.
- Makes sure everyone has their share of time to speak in the meeting.
- Ensures that the agenda items are discussed in a timely manner.
- Ensures that any actions arising are allocated a 'lead' person to see them through.

It is also useful to have a Vice Chair to support the Chair and deputise for them in case of absence.

### Secretary

- Takes notes in the meeting of roughly what points have been made or topics covered.
- Creates the 'minutes' of the meeting from the notes and circulates to members in an appropriate format for each person.
- Circulates the Agenda and any other important documents to read before each meeting.

### Treasurer

- Keeps record of any financial incomings or outgoings of the PPG
- Is responsible for seeing that the financial processes of the group are transparent and fair, and that they are followed.

### Communications Officer

- Updates the outside world on what the PPG is doing by using posters, notice boards, website, social media, writing news stories/a newsletter.
- Could create a leaflet explaining the PPG.
- Could decide on 'branding' for the PPG (e.g. a logo, theme colours, etc).

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### Dealing with complaints

It's not the PPG's job to deal with individual complaints, the Practice has processes for that and if a complaint is made directly to a PPG member they should inform the patient of how to follow this process.

The PPG should only look at anonymised complaints information provided by the Practice (for instance numbers of complaints, or just enough level of detail to identify themes and discuss solutions). The PPG's role is to help the Practice to perform better and find ways to improve patient experience.

Some complaints might arise from patients not being informed enough about what the Practice can do for them, and this is an example of something a PPG can help to solve, by trying to raise awareness of any little-known information.

If a PPG member has a complaint about the practice it should be kept totally separate from their work on the PPG, and the two should not be allowed to affect each other. It is up to the Practice to support the PPG member to feel confident in continuing their role in the event that this happens.

### Working out timings of agenda items

It's best to allow more time than you think you will need for each item, to give you a buffer in case you get really involved in an important discussion. As a guide; unless your agenda is very empty, twenty to thirty minutes should be the longest you spend discussing any one item, and you should only really have one big discussion on the agenda. Presentations should be kept to between ten and fifteen minutes each, plus a little time for questions afterward, and updates on individual actions should be under five minutes long.

### Meetings are overrunning

To help the Chair keep the meeting on track, it's best to agree at the beginning of the meeting whether you all prioritise finishing on time, or prioritise getting through all of the items on the agenda; that way if the discussion goes off on a tangent the Chair will find it easier to bring people back on topic by reminding them to be mindful of the time.

Having the estimated time that you plan to get to each item next to it on the agenda is a good way to help everyone evaluate how the meeting is progressing.

## How to create minutes of meetings

The minutes are just a note of what was discussed at the meeting. The only things they really need to include are:

- When and where the meeting took place.
- A list of everyone who attended (in alphabetical order).
- A list of anyone who sent apologies in advance for not being able to attend.
- A numbered list of the agenda items with bullet points or short, clear notes from the discussions next to, or under, each one.
- Any decisions made at the meeting.
- A list of any actions that were agreed on, assigning each action to one or more people.
- A list of any items which it was agreed should be on the next agenda.

This will help anyone who missed the meeting know what happened, and will help everyone be organised and ready for the next meeting.

## Reaching and hearing from diverse patient audiences

It's important for the PPG to hear from as many different patients as you can. Some patients will not want to speak face to face about their suggestions for the Practice; a suggestions and compliments box located in the waiting room or near the reception desk can be an excellent way to capture the views of people who are too busy to join the group. Don't forget to leave comment cards and pens nearby.

People who want to keep their health issues private might prefer filling in a special survey online anonymously, and that might be easier for people who are housebound too. You can use a website like SurveyMonkey to create your own.

If the PPG is missing people from a certain demographic, reach out to groups who support those communities; talk to leaders or staff, attend meetings if you can. If you're really struggling to hear the voices of certain categories of people, Healthwatch might have data on their experiences already, or contacts you can use to get in touch with key people. You can contact us at any time for ideas on how to engage groups that are difficult to hear from.

Holding events in the practice or nearby could be a good way to get people interested. For instance if you had a large number of diabetic patients and wanted one of them to represent that group on your PPG, holding a 'Diabetes information day', perhaps in partnership with a charity, would attract those patients and you could tell them about your work.

## **Training**

Some of the skills which help people to be effective members of a PPG can seem hard to acquire. Sign up to the Healthwatch Merton newsletter to hear about training and other opportunities and events which PPG members might be interested in.

## **Becoming too focussed on one issue**

Whilst it can be necessary for the group to have one or more issues of focus that they are dealing with for the year, and it is fine to have ‘topic champions’ who are experts in one or more areas of patient experience, the group has to remember that they exist to look at the whole range of issues which patients have, and to respond to any urgent issues that arise.

Consider creating a ‘code of conduct’ for PPG members, maybe in consultation with other patients of the practice, so that you are clear on how to be the health champions which your population need and deserve. Each member should be motivated by the drive to help all patients and to tackle a range of issues.

## **Raising awareness**

If people don’t seem to be aware of all the good work you are doing at your Practice, make sure you are doing enough publicity work. Healthwatch and perhaps other organisations will be happy to share your success stories, or even personal accounts of what it’s like to be on a PPG. Email [info@healthwatchmerton.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchmerton.co.uk) with anything you want to shout about.

## **Key issues you identify are too big for the practice to deal with on its own**

Make sure that you are regularly feeding in your findings about patient experience to Healthwatch Merton, who collect data about what patients think and amplify their voices. If an issue needs to be dealt with at a local Merton or south London level Healthwatch can collate data from a range of GP Practices which reveals themes in the problems, and can work to make sure that this information is being shared and recognised.

Through our links to Healthwatch England we can help take your contributions up to a national level and give messages to the largest organisations in the country, adding more impact.



**A Healthwatch Merton guide to Patient Participation Groups (PPGs)**

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