



# Patient Participation Groups



Royal College of  
General Practitioners





## Contents

Foreword.....	1
Introduction.....	2
What does patient participation involve?.....	3
What is a patient participation group?.....	3
The benefits of having a patient participation group.....	4
Starting a patient participation group.....	4
Recruitment.....	5
Inclusivity.....	6
Initial meetings.....	7
Communicating.....	8
Social media.....	9
Maintaining interest in the group.....	10
Conclusion.....	11





## Foreword

The information and advice contained within this booklet is informed by the 'Growing Patient Participation - Getting Started' booklet, developed by the National Association for Patient Participation (N.A.P.P.). The booklet was also influenced by work undertaken by the Royal College of General Practitioners Northern Ireland's (RCGPNI) Patient in Practice (PiP) Group. The PiP Group work with GPs, Practice Managers, healthcare professionals and statutory bodies to facilitate the development of patient participation at a local level in GP surgeries across Northern Ireland.

The RCGPNI would like to take this opportunity to recognise the inspirational work of N.A.P.P., which was founded 35 years ago to work with patients and practices to improve the quality of patient care and experience through patient participation groups (PPGs). N.A.P.P. is the only UK umbrella organisation for PPGs and practices.

N.A.P.P. is pleased to support this booklet and looks forward to working with RCGPNI in the future. We thank N.A.P.P. for their support of this booklet and the other various stakeholders who have kindly offered their time and experience to review this booklet. RCGPNI would also like to acknowledge the support received from the Health and Social Care Board NI and the Public Health Agency NI which facilitated the development of a short film to complement this booklet.



## Introduction

The aim of this guide is to help and support GPs, Practice Managers and patients within Northern Ireland who are interested in learning more about or establishing a patient participation group (PPG) within their practice. It is hoped that these guidelines will give confidence to those preparing to take on the challenge of ensuring that patients have a stronger voice and greater involvement in the planning and delivery of primary care services.

There is currently no statutory requirement to have personal or public involvement in GP practices in Northern Ireland. However, the RCGPNI and the PiP Group believe that the creation of a PPG can have a significant impact on patient satisfaction for the benefit of all. With over 350 practices in Northern Ireland, there are huge benefits to be gained for patients, practice staff and the wider community as a whole.

GPs, Practice Managers and patients who have been successful in promoting patient involvement and setting up new PPGs have had significant input into the production of these guidelines. It is hoped that the information provided in this booklet will help you in establishing your own group and answer any concerns or questions which you might have.

For more information on this and other resources which the College provides, please contact us at 020 3188 7722, or by email at [nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk). In addition, you can access advice and materials on running a PPG at [www.napp.org.uk](http://www.napp.org.uk) or through the N.A.P.P. helpline at 01932 242 350.

## What does patient participation involve?

Patient participation is about patients and practices working together to:

- Improve communication between GPs, practice staff and patients
- Enable patients to look after their own health, with the support of their GP and practice staff
- Discuss topics of mutual interest to the practice and its patients
- Encourage improvements within the GP practice through the adoption of a change in practice or structure
- Increase patient satisfaction with the service they receive

Patient participation is not a vehicle for individuals to voice personal interests, resolve personal issues or to get additional personal medical service. Rather, it aims to bring about positive change to the benefit of all patients and practice staff.



## What is a patient participation group?

A PPG is made up of patients and practice staff who communicate at regular intervals to consider ways of making a positive contribution to the services and facilities offered by their practice to patients. Not every group will be the same. Each group will evolve and develop to address the needs of the practice and its local community. Members of the PPG should meet face to face with practice colleagues on a regular basis. Many PPGs make use of electronic communication channels now available through the internet to form a virtual group to complement the physical group.

A virtual group tends to receive information whereas the PPG develops the information and works directly with practice colleagues. Most PPGs inform their virtual members about developments and events taking place within the practice. Whatever format the group takes, it is important to ensure that all members feel included and empowered.

### **The benefits of having a patient participation group**

Patients, GPs, practice staff and the wider community can all benefit from the success of a PPG.

Patients will benefit through:

- The opportunity to recommend improvements and to raise issues which can lead to action
- A better awareness of how their practice operates
- A better understanding of the role and workload of a GP and practice staff
- Being enabled to look after their own and their family's health

GPs and practice staff will benefit through:

- Improved communications with their patients
- The potential for a more mutually respectful relationship
- Increased patient participation and support of the practice's aims and objectives

### **Starting a patient participation group**

The initiative to start up a PPG within the practice can come from the GP, Practice Manager or a patient.



“Myself and my Practice Manager had a discussion about (the PPG) seven years ago and then went ahead to form our first group.”  
Dr Shauna Fannin, GP (NI)

### Ingredients for success

To ensure the success of your PPG it is important to secure as many of the following as possible:

- A supportive GP and Practice Manager
- Committed practice staff
- A strong patient voice
- Clear direction and objectives
- An active and sustainable interest within the group
- A group comprised of a wide range of representatives from the practice



### Recruitment

The recruitment of patient members is one of the key stages in setting up your PPG. During the process you should be mindful that the skills necessary to get a group off the ground may be different from those needed to run a well established and organised group. You should also take into consideration the nature and location of your practice as this may have an impact on the structure of the group; for example, if you are in a rural or single handed practice, you will need to consider how best the group can communicate effectively. Ideally, a PPG should have between 6-12 members, including at least one GP partner and the Practice Manager.

There are three main ways in which to recruit members to a PPG:

#### Individual approach

PPGs should be diverse to ensure that the demographics of the practice population are represented. Where possible, you should always try to use a number of different communication methods to ensure that you attempt to attract the widest patient base possible.

#### Open invitation

This form of recruitment is the most popular and democratic way to create a PPG. It provides an opportunity for all patients to put themselves forward for membership, but does require some sort of

advertising to ensure awareness to potential members. Perhaps you could ask the practice to put a poster up in the reception area asking for nominations by a certain date and provide your contact details. Alternatively, you could create a poster to advertise an open night to discuss how a group might set up and invite all interested patients to attend.

### **Random selection**

This form of recruitment involves inviting the participation of patients randomly through a invitation letter. A sample number, a percentage of the total number of patients the practice hopes to engage, should be determined by the practice and be substantial enough to ensure a reasonable response.

### **Inclusivity**

PPGs should be diverse to ensure that the demographics of the practice population are represented. Where possible, you should always try to use a number of different communication methods to ensure that you attempt to attract the widest patient base possible. Whichever method of recruitment is employed it is important to remember that it should be in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 to ensure equal representation.





### Initial meetings

When membership of your new PPG has been finalised it is particularly important to ensure that the first few meetings are well planned and organised. During these meetings emphasis should be placed on the following:

- Participants getting to know each other
- Developing aims and objectives for the group
- Agreeing the initial areas that the group will consider

basis

“We hold (our) meetings on a semi-formal basis, which gives the members of the group a bit more confidence in being able to express their views, and I think that is very important.”

Mr Joe Donaghy, PPG Chair (NI)

Developing a structure will benefit the group in the short and long term. It is strongly recommended that groups should have a Chair and a Secretary. Generally, the group will have a more effective voice if a patient member takes up the role of Chair and a member of the practice team acts as Secretary. This will help ensure that there is a constant flow of information between the patients and the practice. If your PPG hopes to become involved in fundraising for the practice, a Treasurer should also be appointed.

“The work I do (as PPG secretary) is very rewarding and benefits the practice, so there maybe additional work but it is not without additional benefit.”

Mr David Simpson, Practice Manager (NI)

After the initial meeting has taken place, the group should draw up a constitution which clearly sets out how the group will operate. Once the constitution has been agreed upon, it would be prudent to set up a work plan to guarantee the group has achievable goals and direction.

“Our long term plans for the patient participation group is to improve this partnership of trust that we have created between the patient and the practice itself, improve the health literacy of the community around us, try and get more patient activated... and hopefully inspire people to be able to do as much as they can for themselves supported by us.”

Dr Amir Hannan, GP (Manchester)

The RCGPNI PiP group can provide you with advice and assistance on setting agendas and drafting constitutions. RCGPNI has also a DVD to accompany this booklet and help answer some of the questions which you might have about starting a PPG. For additional information, please contact either the RCGPNI office at 020 3188 7722 or [nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk) or N.A.P.P. at 01932 242 350 for advice on how to start a PPG.

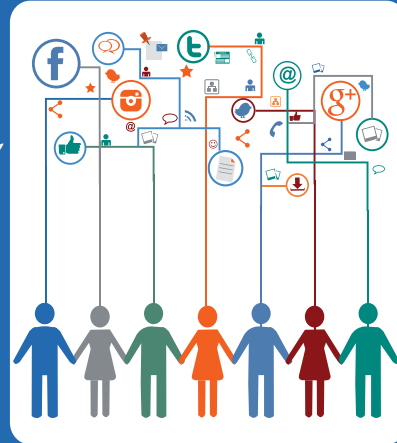
## Communicating

It is essential that information gathered through activities undertaken by the PPG are shared with those within the practice. It is hoped that by sharing this information there will be a significant increase in patient satisfaction and engagement.

“The patient participation group has benefitted the practice in that we now communicate better with our patients and have a better understanding of their needs. They also have a better understanding of what we, as a practice, do and why we do things in a particular way.” Mr David Simpson, Practice Manager (NI)

### Ways to communicate with members of the practice include:

- Information flyers
- Newsletters
- Practice website
- Social media platforms e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Tumblr, Flickr, etc.
- Email
- Notice boards
- Practice information days
- Patients participation group stalls
- Surveys
- Community NI websites



## Social media

In today's fast paced world, face-to-face communication with patients in and outside the GP practice can be limited. The use of social media could aid in solving this issue. By using platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr etc., a practice can keep in touch with the local community at the click of a button.

It is important that a social media policy or strategy is put into place within the practice, so that those building content for the site understand the vision of the practice. This policy or strategy can be a simple statement of what aims and goals the practice and/or PPG would like to accomplish by using social media, and the steps they will take to achieve those aims and goals. The document should also state who is responsible for uploading and/or updating any content, and what kind of content should be made public. Once you have established which social media site(s) the practice would like to utilise, the relevant information should be included on all marketing material and letters that patients will see and/or receive.



## Maintaining interest in the group

Planning ahead for a new PPG can be a challenging task but it is important to keep members focused if the group is to be successful. The following should help to keep your group effective and the agenda focused:

- Groups should aim to be open to a wide range of viewpoints
- Encourage the group to come together around an annual plan of work
- Share the workload of the group
- Provide a wide range of suggestions that permit the group to identify its own objectives and projects
- Organise suitable training for the members and office holders within the group
- Refresh the group and recruit new members every few years if possible

You may also wish to consider longer term projects such as:

- Lobbying locally elected representatives for change
- Investigating the opportunities to have an impact on Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs) and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs)
- Designing and developing a regular patient newsletter and information leaflet

## Conclusion

The benefits of initiating and sustaining a PPG in Northern Ireland, given the proper time and dedication, will be invaluable for both GP practices and the community.

It is the sincere hope of the RCGPNI and the PiP Group that this booklet has provided you with the necessary guidance to get your group started. Should you have any additional questions or would like to contact a member of the RCGPNI PiP Group please contact us at 020 3188 7722 or [nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:nicouncil@rcgp.org.uk). Additional advice and support can be provided through N.A.P.P, [www.napp.org.uk](http://www.napp.org.uk) or by calling 01932 242 350.

“RCGPNI is committed to promoting patient involvement in general practice; I would like to thank all those who continue to work to make this happen.”

Dr O’Kelly, RCGPNI Chair



Supported by



National Association for Patient Participation  
[www.napp.org.uk](http://www.napp.org.uk)  
N.A.P.P helpline at 01932 242 350

The Royal College of General Practitioners (Northern Ireland) is a network of over 1285 family doctors working to improve care for patients. We work to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the voice of GPs on education, training, research and clinical standards.



Royal College of  
General Practitioners

**Royal College of General Practitioners**

4 Cromac Place, Belfast, BT7 2JB

Telephone: 020 3188 7722

Website: [www.rcgp.org.uk](http://www.rcgp.org.uk)

Royal College of General Practitioners is a registered charity in England and Wales (number 223106) and Scotland (number SC040430)

Copyright © 2014 Royal College of General Practitioners