



Speakersâ€™™ Corner - practice manager Christian Jennings MBE on setting up a patient participation group.

This month Christian Jennings MBE, the practice manager for Camberwell Green Surgery, answers questions on how the practice got its patient participation group (PPG) up and running. Having an active PPG is a contractual requirement from 31 March 2016.

How does your PPG work - how often does it meet, who performs which functions, are there any lessons-learned you can share on maximising engagement?

The PPG works by mutual consent; it started some years ago with a group of patients who formed it. This was initially as part of direct enhances service (DES) contract to ensure GP practices had a working PPG. We now meet for two hours each quarter – January, April, July and October. The meetings are offset, alternating between 16:00 and 18:30 starts, to accommodate patients with day-time or evening commitments. At the first meeting we asked for volunteers to take on being Chair and Deputy Chair and two good patients came forward. The Deputy Chair stepped-up to be Chair three years ago, after the initial chair had to step-down due to personal commitments. I now assist the Chair with the agenda, minutes and other admin work.

Each meeting is attended by a senior GP partner, the practice manager and patient services manager who add content and dialogue to each meeting. The PPG has become successful in its own right by actually engaging in the community and with the CCG locality, and much of which is down to the personality, time and effort put in by our chairperson. For example, to increase engagement a number of volunteers attend community-based or locality meetings, reporting back at the main PPG meeting and to the Chair.

When you set up your PPG how did you promote it to patients, including how you explained what it does?

We started by sending out around 200 letters to random patients, plus 50 we selected because we had an idea they would be interested. We now have a membership of about 20, with 10 – 12 regular attendees. Each year we try and add a few more members by word of mouth and advertising.

At the start we set the objectives of the group using the DES document, making it available for all to read. We focussed on the fact that our PPG, and all PPGs, would begin to have greater influence on taking new initiatives forward via their relationship with the practice.

What has your PPG helped you with?

The PPG have been very supportive of the practice in general and have had direct contact with a GP commissioner, because our senior partner was one of the clinical leads in what was the new Southwark CCG for the first two years the PPG was running. The PPG fed into his understanding of the primary and secondary care needs in Southwark. He then fed back on how our practice fitted into the funding sources and the ongoing work in the borough. Our partner also explained the pressures we were under from the CCG, NHS England and our own very large patient list.

Our PPG were pivotal during and after a high level meeting with NHS England on our future sustainability. At the meeting our chair was able to distil the needs of the practice, and explain the important work different funding streams were providing to the patient community.