

**Hilltop Medical Centre  
PPG (Patient Participation Group)  
Report 2014/15**

**Date: March 2014**

The PPG was set up in March 2009 with 10 members and, as at the beginning of this year, the board member group of Hilltop Medical Centre PPG comprises:

Shobhna Dave (Chair)  
Sandra Reed (Secretary)

Beverley Tavares (Vice Chair)  
Pauline Coulthard (Treasurer)

plus supporting PPG members.

A virtual group was successfully set up in 2011 and e-mail addresses are provided by those patients who have agreed to be part of this group, receiving PPG and practice news and information, and providing another excellent source from which to seek views on Practice performance, as well as providing patient input to any future proposed changes within the Practice. The PPG is working alongside the Practice in support of its Care Plan, part of the Enhanced Service, including the introduction of monthly afternoon tea sessions with patients, supported by AgeUK and CarersMK, with limited success. We are liaising with the Practice as to how we can improve on this.

Based on the survey results, the 2014/15 points for discussion are:

- 1. Appointments**
- 2. Telephone calls to the Practice**
- 3. Patient / staff communication difficulties**

As will be seen from this report, following the 2014 survey, the main areas for concern continue to focus on communication. In spite of difficulties, however, the vast majority of patients, once they have an appointment and can consult with a member of the Practice, have stated that they are very happy with the level of care they receive and feel their concerns are treated with sympathy and given the attention they require.

The 2014/15 survey results, together with the reasons for their inclusion in this report and steps being taken in order to effect improvement, were discussed as follows:

- 1. Appointments**
  - a) The on line appointments system is still proving difficult for some patients, with the vast majority finding it a challenge to book an appointment. It appears that the categorised appointment availability system is complicated and unfamiliar to patients who cannot, therefore, be expected to understand it. Many patients give the apparent length of time for an available appointment as 'three weeks'.*
  - b) What can be done to simplify the system and make it easier to understand?*

**Hilltop's responses** : We are unable to singularly change the set up of System 1 on line booking as it is agreed nationally by NHS England. We will however feed back to the System 1 sub group so they can inform NHS England upwards along the chain. In terms of waiting 3 weeks for an appointment; whilst we cannot comment on individual cases since the new year when manpower has been at full strength, both anecdotal as well as survey feedback has shown that patient have been able to get appointment very easily and usually on the same day.

**PPG** : The PPG supports both the telephone and on-line booking systems, but concedes that it is a matter of being “easy when you know how”. It is pleasing to note that steps are being taken to consult with NHS England concerning this nation-wide problem.

The failure of patients to turn up for pre-booked appointments continues to cause appointment availability issues. However, now that Hilltops’ staffing levels are at full capacity and more patients are using the nurse practitioner and pharmacist services, on-the-day appointments are becoming more freely available. This availability is further supported by the extended hours, part of the Enhanced Service.

## **2. Telephoning the Practice**

- a) *Telephones – the speed of answering continues to be an issue. It is acknowledged that there have been improvements but these do not appear to be consistent.*
- b) *Receptionists need further training and support – patients have raised concerns with patient names confusion, blood test results confusion and a comment that receptionists “think they’re GPs”. This could be a reference to the information that patients are pressured to give to receptionists when booking appointments – often at the reception desk, within hearing of other patients.*

**Hilltop’s responses** : There are now 5 receptionists answering phones between 8 and 10 am. The number of calls then is obviously an issue made much worse by patients still calling at that time for results, information about referrals and other non-appointment issues even though the initial message makes clear to call after 11 am. Furthermore, many things can be done on line now and we want to work jointly with our patients to develop that further to make it easier for patients

Receptionists are trained at least monthly and sometimes more often covering all aspects of customer service. In terms of them asking information, they have to ask essential information to ensure that patients are directed to the correct part of the service. It is for the benefit of the patients. No receptionists at any time give out clinical information and if there are any apparent cases can we always encourage to give us the specific details

**PPG:** The PPG acknowledges that patients often fail to adhere to requested telephoning times. The PPG is liaising with Hilltops management with regard to upgrading the PPG email to a commercial Gmail account which will enable the PPG to convey advice on communications and other procedures more easily by distributing messages to the virtual group in one sending instead of by the current email system which will only allow a limited number of email addresses to be contacted at any one time.

## **3. Patient / staff communication difficulties**

- a) *Patients’ concerns are not being adequately responded to. The same issues of communication arise year on year in survey results, including difficulties with accents.*
- b) *Continuity of care by the same practitioner is an issue, with patients complaining that they seldom see the same doctor for the same condition.*

**Hilltop’s responses** : As always we cannot comment on individual cases. Suffice to say that we are thankful to all our patients for the amazing feedback they have given us on the communication front in our FFT returns. Having said that we ensure that all staff meet their regulatory body standards and any notion of going otherwise would be about prejudice which we would never do.

Continuity is a priority of ours and again we thanks our patients for the feedback re the individual named doctor work we have been doing starting with the over 75’s and over time moving to all patients registered with the surgery. The system of usual doctor still continues and we encourage our patients to aim to see their usual GP and at times may be worth waiting a day or two for non urgent complaints as that will enable continuity

**PPG** : The PPG can only reiterate points a) and b) above, based on the survey results. It is anticipated that the point raised in b) above will improve – see PPG responses to 1.