

## Patient Participation Group (PPG) Meeting – Minutes

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Date: June 10, 2025. Time: 7pm. Location: Heartwood Medical Practice

Chair: Graham Joynes/Michelle Hurley

Attendees: Graham Joynes, Dawn Joynes, Steven Nall, Jennette Carolan, Stephanie Marbrow, Wilfred Marbrow, Mary Ben Okeke, Mark Essex, Karen Warr, Wendy Clark, Melissa Langdon, Alan Tyrell, Tommy McKinstry, Jacqueline McKinstry, Bernie Wright.

### Welcome and Introductions

The Practice Manager welcomed all attendees to the meeting, noting a particularly strong turnout with many new faces in attendance.

Attendees were thanked for their interest and willingness to positively contribute towards improving the practice and patient experience.

### Overview of PPG

The purpose of the PPG was discussed – how the group should act as a critical friend of the practice to support us to improve services, where feasible, from a patient perspective.

Those able to volunteer time to support with projects and schemes, such as health promotion – e.g walking groups, marshals for vaccination programmes and such like, assisting with promotion of digital schemes, such as encouraging the use of NHS App etc.

A reminder of the confidentiality of information shared in these forums that isn't intended to be discussed outside of the meetings, other than the minutes that are shared.

### Practice Update

- **Challenges and Open Forum – Patient Experiences and Feedback**

There was a wide-ranging discussion with many patients sharing lots of personal experiences—both positive and negative. A theme among these was the feeling, for some, that their expectations had not always been fully met with regards to waiting times for routine appointments. It was acknowledged that appointments that are more time urgent are dealt with quicker, typically on the same day. These perspectives were heard respectfully and with the understanding that such feedback helps the practice reflect and improve where feasible.

The group acknowledged that while frustrations exist, they are not unique to our practice and some attendees shared their experience of Heartwood offering a far better service than experienced at other GP surgeries outside of Swadlincote.

All GP surgeries are experiencing similar pressures due to increased patient numbers, unprecedented demand and the expectations of patients.

Other challenges for the practice include the targets set in GP contracts, with little financial support. This, coupled with limited NHS funding at a time of increased outgoings with staff wage rises, a 50% increase on NMW over past 6 years, and the 2025 NIC impact makes the financial budget very challenging, so unfortunately it is not possible to hire endless more GPs.

Despite some critical feedback, many attendees offered praise for the staff and recognised the effort and commitment being shown across the practice. It was noted that, comparatively, the practice is doing very well in extremely challenging circumstances.

- **Staffing and Appointment Systems**

An update was shared regarding the Heartwood clinical staff team, with us being fully staffed and settled. Reception and admin team have experienced some leavers, but we are now fully staffed, with some recent new joiners in training. Heartwood employs 36 members of staff.

Feedback through formal channels illustrate that our team are highly thought of by patients and receive compliments on their care. Sadly, a minority of patients direct their frustrations and abuse our front-line staff. This is unacceptable and is dealt with by formal warning letters where appropriate. It can directly impact on staff retention though, creating additional time, resource and financial burden to replace.

Appointment availability and wait times was discussed with an acknowledgement that this issue is across all GP surgeries. Each GP surgery will operate its own tailored appointment system to aim to meet acceptable and relevant demand. Patients are unique in their health needs and so mixed feedback is expected.

It was highlighted that although we cannot directly access additional funding for more staffing to deliver extra appointments, our patients do benefit from increased appointment availability through shared PCN staff working from a central PCN hub in Woodville.

Feedback was shared on lack of online bookable appointments. It was acknowledged that while online appointments provide convenience, allocating too many online can reduce access for those needing to book by phone or in person. Additionally, inappropriate self-booking with the wrong clinician can result in duplicated appointments and further delays which is inefficient.

- **Phone System Feedback**

Some patients raised issues with the telephone system occasionally disconnecting their call. No formal complaints have been received to date, but the practice welcomes specific examples to investigate further. All were reminded to press option 8 for a call-back to avoid being on hold. It was noted that sometimes patient calls take longer than others. Many of our calls are complex enquiries, some need further discussion with colleagues, which can contribute to delays in answering the phone queue. A review of the greeting message will be considered. The group was informed that a new phone system is due to be implemented in October.

- **Areas where the PPG can support the practice**

- **Patient Education and Public Relations**

A key theme throughout the meeting was the importance of educating the community for improving patient understanding about the role of GP services and other available avenues for care. It was agreed that greater focus on patient education would be helpful towards striving to improve use of relevant health services to avoid unnecessary GP contact and promote self-care.

**Examples of alternative services include:**

NHS 111, Community pharmacies, Online symptom checkers and advice portals

**Suggestions included using multiple channels to promote this information:**

Website updates, Social media posts, Posters in the practice, Phone greeting reminder of other services available, TV screens in the waiting room

- **Supporting Self-Service Tools – NHS App and Beyond**

It was proposed that the PPG support the practice by holding events to help patients use digital tools such as the NHS App, AirMid, and Patient Knows Best. These tools help patients take more ownership of their health and access services more efficiently.

It was suggested that such events could take place on Friday afternoons to suit the availability of some PPG members.

#### **Role of the PPG and Meeting Expectations**

The group was reminded of the purpose of the PPG: to be an action-focused, constructive forum for supporting the practice. While personal experiences are welcomed, the primary purpose of the meeting is not to address individual complaints, which should be raised separately or under Any Other Business.

#### **Action Points**

- Review the balance of online vs. phone/in-person appointment availability
- Monitor any feedback on telephone system issues (with examples if possible)
- Review telephone greeting to establish if any efficiencies in signposting to other relevant services or if NHS website or NHS app can assist to reduce waiting times
- Develop and promote patient education materials across multiple platforms
- Plan for digital support sessions on NHS App, AirMid, and PKB – explore Friday afternoons
- Continue discussions with PPG about possible community engagement and education events
- Consider introducing email for PPG members to liaise and assist with gathering any information, feedback themes and planning for activities, independent of NHS email/Management oversight.

#### **Any Other Business (AOB)**

Individual discussions took place at the end of the meeting, post 8.30pm

#### **Next Meeting**

Date and time of the next PPG meeting: TBC – Mid-September.