



GP Practices and Patients – Working Together

N.A.P.P.’s message to all is that PPGs and practice staff must work together to help each other

We understand that these are worrying and upsetting times for everyone-patients and staff, and it is natural that patients look to their GP surgery as a source of information and support during this outbreak. Very sadly, the reports of abuse we have heard indicate that some patients are forgetting the impact their actions and words can have on the hardworking staff who keep their local surgery running for the benefit of us all.

As you will know, GPs were already under considerable pressure before this pandemic. The surge in workload from Coronavirus is likely to leave many GPs and support staff struggling to cope - particularly if practices are left short-staffed either due to staff being ill or self-isolating. Some practices are small, and if staff have to stay home sick, it will not be long before the remaining staff are overwhelmed. It is worth remembering that it just takes one case of Coronavirus walking in to shut the practice for at least a day.

If we do not all look after our GP practice staff, then we will all be considerably worse off. Frustrating though some measures might feel to us (such as asking patients visiting the surgery to remain in their cars until called for their appointment), they are all done for a single purpose - to keep patients, and the surgery staff, safe.

With this in mind, N.A.P.P. is calling on all PPG groups across the nation to encourage their members to be kind to their practice staff - while those staff do everything in their power to help us. In this email we share ideas of how your PPG can support their GP practice. Please feel free to share sections of this advice ‘as is’ with your PPG members, if appropriate, or adapt them to suit the needs of your specific practice.

First, read through the advice and decide what is relevant for your PPG, and make any additions. Then, ask your practice to confirm how you can best communicate with all practice patients, and finally use those channels to circulate your recommendations as widely as possible.

How can patients help relieve the pressure on your GP practice?

Some examples:

- Use e-Consult – available through the practice website (this is a system where patients email their medical query in, and a doctor responds via email) – to avoid visiting the surgery and to enable the surgery to handle queries more efficiently.
- Request a bookable telephone appointment. All routine face-to-face appointments normally offered are now being offered as bookable telephone appointments, and in some practices, these are being under-used.
- Continue to phone the surgery when you are ill with a condition other than Covid-19. Be clear with patients that triage is still available through your practice for emergency illnesses other than Coronavirus. Patients can phone in the normal way - but they should be prepared for a slightly longer wait to get through any recorded messages and phone queueing. Remind them to be patient as they wait for longer to speak to a receptionist, and reassure them they will get through.
- No patient should sit and wait out an illness, trying to be helpful by staying away. A delay in treatment can result in patients later becoming seriously ill, which will put more strain on the NHS. Please make it clear to patients that they are not always helping the NHS by not talking to their GP!

You may find that your PPG members are keen to help in some way, but not medically trained. How can they help?

There are many ways your PPG members can help support each other, and therefore relieve pressure on the NHS.

NHS Volunteer Responders has been set up to support the NHS, and your members can [register directly here](#).

- **Collecting medication**

Volunteers can pick up medicines on someone else's behalf. Remind patients that they should only request medication that they need, in their usual quantities. If a volunteer is picking up medicines for someone else, remind them to keep a safe distance when leaving any items on the person's doorstep or drop off area, and to make sure that the patient has taken the medicine in before leaving.

- **Encourage others to stay mentally and physically active**

There are lots of things that people can do at home to keep themselves busy: cooking, reading, online learning or watching films, to name just a few. PPGs can encourage their members to swap suggestions with people they are supporting about how they can all keep busy, both physically and mentally. If they are well enough, they can encourage

those they are supporting to do some light exercise and keep active around the home, perhaps by using an online exercise class (or even spring cleaning!).

- **Encourage others to use NHS services correctly, if they are unwell.**

Members can educate those around them to use the wide range of NHS services correctly if they are ill. These services have been designed to reduce strain on frontline services by encouraging patients to self-serve, or to seek support from the right NHS service (such as pharmacists, or walk-in centres). Members can encourage others to use the NHS 111 online Coronavirus service if they are worried that they have Coronavirus. They should only call 111 if they cannot get online, their symptoms worsen or they have been instructed to. As always, stress to members that they and others should call 999 if they believe someone's life is at risk.

- **Can members still help if they need to stay at home?**

Members can sign up as a telephone 'check in and chat' volunteer even if they are staying at home and self-isolating. They can [register directly here](#). They will be asked to select from a list of tasks that they would like to do. Once their registration and checks are complete they will be sent details of how to receive tasks direct to their device. Local volunteer tasks will be pushed to their phone with an alert when members switch the app to 'on duty'.



Community Response volunteer: This role involves collecting shopping, medication or other essential supplies for someone who is self-isolating, and delivering these supplies to their home.



Patient Transport volunteer: This role supports the NHS by providing transport to patients who are medically fit for discharge, and ensuring that they are settled safely back in to their home.



NHS Transport volunteer: This role involves transporting equipment, supplies and/or medication between NHS services and sites, it may also involve assisting pharmacies with medication delivery.



Check-in and Chat volunteer: This role provides short-term telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation.



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Thank you

Please help each other by obeying NHS guidelines of hand washing, staying at home and self- isolating where appropriate. Consider your neighbours and those in your community who may be isolated and share ideas with N.A.P.P. Finally, and most importantly, do offer support to your GP practice. We all need them.