

Launceston Medical Centre
Patient Participation Group (PPG)
Minutes from the Meeting held on

14 July 2025 at 6pm at Launceston Medical Centre and Online

Present: Andrew Yardley (Practice Manager), Paul Ford (Chair), Joan Heaton (Vice Chair), Jess Careswell (Social Prescriber), Dr Damon Dennis (Cornwall Councillor), Steve Dymond, Pam Griffiths (online), Mary Groves, Pete Hancock, Liz L'Estrange West (online), Dawn Rogers, Andi Snook (online), Bonnie Soanes, Sylvia Thevissen (Online), Malcolm Tulip

Apologies: Fliss Hedges, Angela Hutchins

Chair's welcome and confidentiality reminder until the minutes are approved

Practice Manager's report:

Three new GPs are starting in the coming months: Dr Abdul Bati (next week), Dr Isabel Newman Cooper (December, 8 sessions), and Dr Harry Thearon (August). The practice has taken on one more GP than planned due to a great choice of candidates. The practice is now fully subscribed with GPs.

The practice is recruiting for dispensary staff due to one resignation and one staff member going on maternity leave. It is difficult to recruit trained dispensers, so the practice is considering training interested administrative staff, like how the repeats clerk was trained.

Fifty solar panels (22 kilowatts) will be installed on the practice roof in early August, which is expected to reduce the monthly electricity bill of approximately £3,000 by around £800. The project, costing about £30,000, is being financed by a bank loan with an estimated payback period of six years. Approval from the landlord was a major delay, requiring structural surveys.

A paper-based survey on the 'eConsult' system was conducted, receiving 184 responses, primarily from individuals over 75. The feedback was polarised, with patients either loving or hating the system. A significant minority of respondents expressed distress, believing they are no longer permitted to telephone the surgery for any reason. An online survey, still live, showed a similar polarising view with an average score of 2.83 out of 5.

Key areas for focus identified from the surveys include simplifying the online form, though a simpler form may not provide enough information for effective triage. The practice is considering other systems like AccuRx and Anima but will stick with eConsult for now. The online system's operating hours will be extended to match phone line hours (8:30 am to 6:00 pm) by October as per new requirements for equity of access. This raises concerns about managing potentially serious issues submitted late in the day. The possibility of keeping administrative enquiry lines open 24/7 was discussed. There is a need to improve support for non-digital options and ensure there are separate pathways for vulnerable patients.

There is a recognised training issue with reception staff regarding the eConsult system and handling patient enquiries. Examples were shared of patients being told to use the online form even when they were asked to book an appointment or were present at the surgery. It was acknowledged that the practice is not consistently getting the balance right and sometimes pushes the online form too insistently, causing patient frustration. The importance of giving patients options and improving how staff handle individual situations was highlighted.

There is a misconception among some patients that patient advisors, not clinicians, triage all eConsult forms. It was clarified that while patient advisors handle straightforward requests, triage doctors review more complex cases and anything patient advisors are unsure about. Improving communication about this process was suggested.

The dispensary has been struggling since the bank holidays, with prescription turnaround times exceeding the usual five working days, leading to delays and issues at the collection hatch. An emergency meeting was held, and with the help of locum dispensers and working on Saturdays, the service is now back on track.

Launceston Hospital's Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) will be closing for eight weeks from 25/07/2025 due to staffing issues (promotions, retirement, and training new recruits). This is a temporary closure. Concerns were raised about the impact of this closure, especially during the summer holiday period and its overlap with

doctors' strikes. It was suggested that the Patient Participation Group (PPG) write to the Cornwall Foundation Trust (CFT) to express these concerns.

The practice stopped its prescription delivery service for vulnerable patients due to commercial reasons. The idea of using local shops as medication collection points is being explored, similar to a model used by a practice in Port Isaac. This could support local businesses and patients, potentially as a voluntary-led system.

The practice will explore finding suitable customer service training for patient-facing staff, particularly patient advisors and dispensers.

The practice will explore the feasibility of using local shops as collection points for prescriptions.

Patient feedback indicates a significant minority of, particularly elderly, patients feel they are no longer allowed to telephone the practice and must use the online eConsult form, causing distress.

There are inconsistencies in how reception staff handle patient requests, with some patients being inappropriately directed to fill out an eConsult form when they have been asked to book an appointment by a clinician or a text message. This points to a need for better staff training and communication. There is difficulty in finding suitable customer service training geared specifically for general practice staff.

The dispensary has recently experienced significant delays, with prescription turnaround times extending to 6-8 working days, causing issues for patients collecting medication. This is now resolved.

The issue of patients not attending appointments (DNAs) persists. The most effective measure to reduce DNAs is a shorter time between booking and the appointment date.

Social Prescriber's Report:

Data from a Health Hub survey showed that 38% of respondents would have accessed the GP practice if the hub was not available, and 24% would have used

other services like 111 or minor injuries. Since its launch on 11/07/2024, there have been 367 referrals from the medical centre to hub services and 394 to social prescribing. A 50% drop-in GP appointments was observed for patients accessing hub services (comparing six-month periods before and after). The number of high-frequency users (over 25 GP appointments per year) at Launceston has dropped from 893 (4.7% of patients) to 538 (2.8%), a change not seen at Tamar Valley Health, which does not have a similar hub. Ben Maguire MP has been provisionally invited to the hub participation group on 07/08/2025.

Action Points:

1. Paul Ford will draft and send a letter to the CFT regarding the MIU closure.
2. Andy Yardley will circulate the online survey results for distribution.
3. Andy Yardley will look into specific examples of inconsistent advice from reception if dates are provided.
4. Mary Groves will investigate who Derriford Hospital uses for their receptionist training and report back.
5. Ideas for potential pilot sites for a prescription collection point service in local villages should be sent to Paul Ford who will collate the information for Andy Yardley.
6. A meeting will be planned for August to mark the 12-month anniversary of the Health Hub.

Questions for Andy:

Q1. Dermatology Clinics – could they be located locally rather than outside Launceston?

A. The Health Hub is looking into this – dependent on clinical appropriate space.

Q2 How is the EPS procurement Project progressing?

A. Waiting for demo of systems to choose the right one.

Q3. NHS Records – how are patients informed of test results?

A. Patients will be informed if there is an issue – if normal then patient will see on records.

Meeting closed at: 7.25pm

Date of next meeting: Monday 15 September 2025

