

# Engaging with patients – dos and don'ts

## The Healthwatch Surrey Guide

Patients tell us that how they are communicated with can have a real impact on their experience with, and thoughts on, their general practice. Whether you're asking for views on a proposed change, communicating a new process, or simply keeping patients updated, there are a few key things to keep in mind.



### 1. Location

✓ **DO: Go to your patients**

✗ **DON'T Expect patients to come to you**

When people are comfortable in their surroundings they are generally more open to giving feedback or receiving information. Think about the particular cohort you're trying to reach and where they might be found in the community.

If you're asking patients to come to you, **DO** offer an incentive for attendance where possible. Consider opportunities such as blood pressure testing or other health checks to make it worth people's time and effort. Also **DO** make sure there are a range of timing options to suit different schedules – those working vs not working, those with childcare responsibilities etc.



### 2. Format

✓ **DO: Ensure there are a range of ways people can share their thoughts and/or receive information**

✗ **DON'T: Assume everyone feels comfortable communicating in the same way**

For some people a digital survey is the quickest and easiest way to offer feedback, others don't even have access to the internet. Some people value a text message, others never use a mobile phone. Ensure that there are a variety of options available – both digital and non digital – when requesting feedback from or communicating information to patients. **DO** ensure options are accessible for those with sight or hearing impairments.



### 3. Language

✓ **DO: Use plain English**

✗ **DON'T: Use jargon**

It can be tempting to use medical terminology to ensure accuracy. However, this can be both hard to understand and off putting. Use clear, concise, simple language in all communication, but **DON'T** speak down or patronise.

**DO:** Pay particular attention to the use of abbreviations and acronyms – these should be avoided, if at all possible, and certainly spelt out if not.



### 4. Transparency

✓ **DO: Be honest about how feedback will be used**

✗ **DON'T: Offer vague assurances**

Patients tell us that a barrier to providing feedback can be the belief that “it won’t make any difference.” Ensure that you have a clear strategy in place for how feedback will be utilised and communicate this to patients.

**DO** ensure that you update patients on how their insights have contributed to changes which have been made (and be honest about where change wasn’t possible).



### 5. Questions

✓ **DO: Allow patients to speak freely**

✗ **DON'T: Only use one form of question format**

Though simple questions, with multiple choice answers, can provide useful data, open ended questions may provide you with richer insights. Encouraging patients to offer thoughts and opinions will ensure that you’re genuinely reflecting users’ needs, experiences and priorities in any changes that are made as a result of feedback.

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