**Introduction**

The NHS Central London Clinical Commissioning Group User Panel (the User Panel) is a group of 25 patients that supports NHSCL to engage and consult with its patient population. The User Panel have elected their Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice Chair for the past two years and the Chair sits on NHSCL’s Governing Body as a voting member, with the Deputy Chair attending as an Alternate Board Member. The User Panel has 25 members from across its 36 member practices and aims to establish a membership that represents each practice.

Members of the User Panel sit, in pairs, on NHSCL’s main committees, such as the Finance and Performance Committee, Quality and Safety Committee and the Transformational Redesign Group. User Panel members are also members of NHSCL’s Special Interest Groups (SIGs), which are established to steer key projects such as redesigns, and participate in the meetings for the three Locality Groups (north, central and south) working with practices to improve services in their specific locality.

The role of User Panel members in the above committees and steering groups is to advocate for the patient and public voice, contributing to discussions and planning to keep patients at the heart of decisions made by NHSCL whether at a service or strategic level. To underpin this, the User Panel members and the CCG have forged links with the wider patient and public community, including Westminster LINk (and Healthwatch in future), service user groups, community groups and the voluntary sector. This enables User Panel members, acting as leads to access and engage with the wider population.

**History**

The current NHSCL User Panel was formed as a result of Practice Based Commissioners, Central London Healthcare (CLH) and Victoria Commissioning Consortium (VCC), coming together in April 2012.

In 2008, CLH had invited a group of patients, recommended by their GP practices, to form the User Panel and work with CLH in developing and planning local health services. In 2009, the Chair of the User Panel was invited to join CLH’s Board as a voting member.

In 2010 VCC invited a patient representative to join their Board following which a Patient Forum was formed. In 2012 VCC and CLH came together, to form NHS Central London Clinical Commissioning Group, which resulted in the merger of the CLH User Panel and VCC Patient Forum to form one User Panel.
Structure
The User Panel focus on four key areas to ensure that NHSCL are fully engaging with patients, the public and carers:

**PPG and Community Networks**
This group is primarily responsible for supporting practices to establish and develop Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), which allows a wider network of patients to be engaged in working with their practices to improve the services they provide. Having a User Panel membership drawn predominantly from member PPGs enables a two-way route between NHSCL and the patient populations of our practices, and supports escalation of wider concerns and issues and awareness of opportunities to be involved in shaping the future of health services beyond the GP practice. This subgroup also holds bi-annual meetings for patients from all PPGs to attend, to support collaboration and discuss key issues.

By building relationships with community groups, attending their meetings and inviting them to CCG events, the User Panel and NHSCL are able to understand more about our local population, raise awareness of the opportunities to influence local NHS services and develop routes for groups to feedback who do not ordinarily engage with PPGs or other consultation events.

**Commissioning**
This group seeks to ensure that engagement with patients is taking place at all stages of the commissioning cycle. The group regularly review commissioning projects and plans for service redesign to seek appropriate patient leads to join the Special Interest Groups and supports them in accessing the voice of service users with experience of the appropriate services. The group also supports engagement events with the wider population to ensure appropriate feedback into the commissioning cycle. Patients from the group have also joined those from neighbouring boroughs in a procurement panel to support the involvement of patients and residents in the procurement process.

**Communication**
This group works with NHSCL to ensure that communications aimed at patients are easy to understand and provide the right information. Examples of where this group have contributed include NHSCL’s quarterly newsletter and patient information leaflets. This group also helps to promote the role of the User Panel and the wider opportunities to influence health services.

**Financial transparency and accountability**
This group works with NHSCL to ensure financial transparency and accountability so that patients can have confidence that monies intended for patient care are fully utilised for that purpose and represent value for money from a patient perspective in the commissioning of services.
Future Goals and Priorities for 2013/14

- Working with practices to establish a Patient Participation Group (PPG) or equivalent means of engagement at all of our member practices;
- Develop the membership of the User Panel to more fully represent our member practices and work towards establishing a membership which is democratically elected;
- Further developing patient input (from service users and non-service users) to strengthen patient involvement at all stages of planning, contracting and monitoring of our commissioning decisions;
- Gather, record and act on patient experience and outcomes to inform service design and development, build local capability and develop best practice in patient engagement;
- Develop best practice in involving patients in management and financial decision-making of the CCG to ensure continued public accountability and transparency in planning and delivering its activities;
- Developing our bi-monthly forum for PPGs across our CCG so that they become a lively space for supporting shared learning and collaboration across patient communities in our area
- Develop networks with other patient / service user groups, including those for providers, which will allow us to work together with the right service users to develop better services that patients will want to use

Benefits so far:
- Ensures that patients are part of the discussion and are at the heart of decision making with the power to influence those decisions;
- Brings together people who are passionate about improving services in their community;
- Has changed the perception of involving patients in planning and developing services, whether at a service redesign, board or strategic planning level;
- Focussed subgroups have helped target activity to underpin the objectives of the User Panel and NHSCL;
- Helps raise awareness of NHSCL with patients and the community;
- Provides a critical friend not only to the Governing Body but throughout the NHSCL team and providers;

Areas to consider:
- Resource and structures are needed to support the activities and development of the group
- Patients sitting on committees are there to make a constructive contribution to the deliberations and must not be seen to be there as a tick box exercise. This means ensuring that expectations are clear to everybody.

To contact the User Panel email cluserpanel@nhs.net or call 020 7535 4779.