

Hollies Patient Forum

NEWSLETTER

No. 8 March 2026



The Hollies Patient Forum (HPF) is the patient voice of the Hollies Medical Centre (HMC)

HPF is a 'Patient Participation Group' (PPG) that allows patients to offer their views, experiences, suggestions and ideas to the Centre through a strong and close working partnership between patients and the practice.

HPF Steering Group

Information about the Group, its work, notes from its meetings and copies of the Newsletter can be found at:

<https://www.theholliesmc.co.uk/the-hollies-patient-forum>

Hollies Patient Forum in 2025

- There were six meetings of the Forum. Currently, the group has 12 members, plus an online eGroup of 70 who provide feedback on their patient experiences.

- The Forum undertook a Patient Survey, which provided valuable insights into the strengths of the Hollies and areas for attention. A copy of the Report can be found at

<https://www.theholliesmc.co.uk/common/getdocument?id=373441>

- Every meeting is attended by a GP and the Practice Manager, who give updates on the changes and issues affecting the Practice.

- Members maintained an effective working relationships with the Practice, providing feedback on the impact of the new the GP contract, especially the changes in contact hours.

- Members assisted at several vaccine clinics.

- HPF collaborated with patient participation groups in nearby GP practices through the Porter Valley Primary Care Network (PVPCN). The Network held two meetings at the Kings Centre on Union Road in Nether Edge.

- The Forum submitted an unsuccessful application for the Corkhill Award, given for outstanding work by a patient participation group.

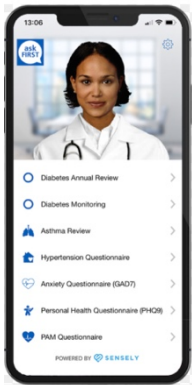
- Work began on a Patient Guide to the Hollies Medical Centre, which will be available in the Spring.

- Developed plans for 2026 that include improving the ways that patients are informed about developments in primary care and liaising with community-based organisations to maximise awareness of health and self-care.

Get in touch

We want to encourage participation in the Newsletter. If you have comments or contributions, please email newsletterhpf@gmail.com

AI Symptom Checkers



You probably missed it, but in early December chatbot 'Olivia' appeared for a short time at the bottom of the Hollies webpage. She is no longer there, but her short stay is worth reflecting on, because such chatbots may be a sign of things to come.

Olivia is one face of 'Ask FIRST', an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot originally developed with the NHS as 'Ask NHS'. It is a 'symptom checker' that, through a series of questions and patient answers, evaluates symptoms, determines priority, and directs a patient to the appropriate service. There is a YouTube demo at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcmeD_iZiSw

'Sensely', the company operating 'Ask FIRST', describes their chatbot as 'empathy-driven' and claims it acts as a 'front door for NHS GP Services ... supporting both patients and clinicians 24/7'. 'Ask FIRST' adopts a risk-averse approach; its advice usually recommends seeing your GP, calling 111, going to A&E, or calling 999. When a referral to an NHS service is deemed unnecessary, 'Ask FIRST' offers guidance on self-care.

No one claims that a chatbot consultation can match seeing a doctor, who can explore your illness history, perform a physical examination, and understand your mood. However, supporters argue chatbots are a useful resource, especially outside of normal hours. 'Ask First' receives high ratings: 4.6 stars at the App Store and 4.2 stars at Google Play.

Critics worry that chatbots have limited information, hence are more likely to miss or misdiagnose a person's illness. Another concern is that the offer to check symptoms might become a hurdle that people feel they have to jump before seeking professional help, hence delaying and discouraging contact.

In February this year, a research group at the University of Oxford published a report on consultation chatbots. The Report's

headline conclusion was that 'Despite all the hype, AI just isn't ready to take on the role of the physician. Patients need to be aware that asking a large language model about their symptoms can be dangerous, giving wrong diagnoses and failing to recognise when urgent help is needed.' <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2026-02-10-new-study-warns-risks-ai-chatbots-giving-medical-advice>

Patient Representation in the Porter Valley Primary Care Network

The Hollies Medical Centre is part of the Porter Valley Primary Care Network (PVPCN). There are six practices in the network, which comprises around 45,000 patients. The Hollies Patient Forum has been liaising with other patient groups across the network to share resources (e.g., survey methodology), provide support for new groups, and strengthen patient representation in the delivery of primary care. In addition, several 'Patient Voice' meetings have been held since 2024, attended by patients from all practices and providing important updates and networking opportunities.

Patient groups in the PVPCN are well-placed to offer feedback to practices, based on survey data and patient experience. They can collaborate with practices to develop strategies for maximising the quality of patient care, especially during periods of change. For 2026, the government's [10-year Plan for Health in England](#), and the new [GP contract](#) running from April onwards, are both likely to impact services in several ways. It's vital that patients have a voice to ensure practices and primary care networks are fully aware of the patient experience. They must also be provided with sufficient information not just to be able to navigate successfully any changes in the health system but also to maximise their capacity for self-care and well-being.

Patient groups will continue to provide updates for all patients across the PVPCN to ensure that we are all as informed and empowered as possible.