



European Federation of
Homeopathic Patients' Associations

GUIDELINES ON FORMING A PATIENTS' ASSOCIATION

It is assumed that the proposed group will be composed in the main of members who do not benefit financially from homeopathy. However, it is essential to work in collaboration with the professional homeopaths in your country.

The aim of the organisation is to inform the public about homeopathy and the location of homeopathic doctors, veterinary surgeons and other professionals and to hold regular meetings to inform and educate members in the uses and value of homeopathy. Response to request for lists of homeopathic doctors, veterinary surgeons and pharmacies should be sent out promptly with general information leaflets on the work of the Association. A leaflet explaining all about homeopathy should also be included. If in doubt about the wording of such a leaflet, examples from other associations belonging to EFHPA can be a useful guide. It will also be necessary to be politically aware of the situation regarding homeopathy in your country and in Europe.

HOW EFHPA CAN HELP YOU -
Information, advice and experience.

POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND

The success of any organisation depends on two main factors:

- The willingness of several people to form a committee, and put in some hard work, especially initially. Running a Patients' Association well involves a tremendous amount of time and effort, and the brunt of this invariably falls on just a few people. Good forward planning is essential.
- The availability and willingness of local, and perhaps not so local, homeopaths to speak at meetings.

Some areas have few, if any, homeopaths and it is then more difficult for a support group to survive and thrive. Most people join a homeopathic Association to learn more about homeopathy, therefore if their group resorts to inviting people to speak on subjects other than homeopathy, membership could quickly dwindle although in reality, occasionally including talks on other complementary therapies can open up further interest.

Sometimes you may have to import speakers from some distance which may be a costly and difficult solution but it can be well worth the additional expense if the speaker is well known nationally. The formation of a study group to maintain and expand interest is worth considering if you have someone who is sufficiently knowledgeable as leader.

FIRST STEPS

If one person (or more), taking into consideration the above, is willing to start a Patients' Association, they should first try to establish how many other people in the locality are interested in homeopathy. Try for a small editorial insertion in Health magazines to the effect that anyone interested in joining together to form a homeopathic group in the stated geographical area should please contact the named person. Contact should also be made with the local press and radio; they can be very helpful in getting interested people to contact the organiser.

Self-produced neat hand written or computer-generated posters should be displayed in Whole/health food shops, chemists, libraries and other sympathetic/suitable sites. If and when a sufficient number of people (to form a small committee) have made contact, all should be invited to an initial meeting, preferably in someone's home to save on expenditure. Ideas as to the aims of the Association, plus the possibility of suitable speaker/s and venue for the inaugural meeting should be discussed. Willingness to support the fledgling group should be confirmed at this meeting. Venues for the inaugural meeting should have been previously investigated as to cost, size, availability and any other relevant information in order that an immediate choice can be made.

If all goes well, an inaugural public meeting should then be called to launch the Association – obviously as much publicity as possible will be needed.

THE INAUGURAL MEETING

The form of this meeting would probably be:

- 1) A welcome by the Chairman of the inaugural meeting plus (briefly) the reasons for and the background to the meeting
- 2) A short introductory talk about homeopathy
- 3) Formal election of Officers - Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer and Committee (not too large, possibly four)
- 4) Choose the name of the Association
- 5) Recommendation and agreement of the annual subscription
- 6) Refreshments

During the refreshments those present should be asked to pay their subscription (a receipt should be given) and to leave their names and addresses. Items 3 and 5 could be unofficially arranged beforehand.

THE FOLLOW-UP

Following this meeting, the newly elected Officers and Committee must meet again as soon as possible to formulate a programme/newsletter and to organise the printing/ photocopying. It is important to maintain the initial interest and enthusiasm therefore a quick follow-up is essential. Once produced, the programme and any newsletter should be sent to all members and potential members.

Posters/flyers need to be displayed advertising the Association and the date of the next meeting.

The Patients' Association is on its way! Good luck!

NEXT STEPS

Obviously, within a short time, provision must be made for a bank account. A decision whether or not to produce membership cards also needs to be taken but generally these are not an economical option. Once established, the Association will need to approve and adopt a constitution.

The most important part of the Association's work will be to distribute lists of homeopathic doctors and veterinary surgeons and other professionals. Although it will eventually be necessary to set up a contact telephone line, it is not ethical or practical to give out the names over the phone. Initially it is a good idea to ask callers to send for the list with a stamped and self addressed envelope. This keeps costs down to a minimum. If the envelope is too small, simply stick it to a larger one containing the information A leaflet containing an invitation to join the Association should be included in each reply.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Venue - The chosen venue for meetings must obviously be as central and convenient as possible, preferably with access for disabled people and should be reasonably priced. Some schools double as Community Centres and can offer inexpensive accommodation. Church Halls can be similarly useful. Local Authority/Tourist Office Information Centres frequently have lists of meeting venues.

Meetings - Frequency varies but it is important to maintain interest. The meetings can take the form of -

1. A few minutes for announcements, it is advantageous to keep everyone as informed as possible regarding events in the world of homeopathy.
2. Approximately 45 to 60 minutes for the speaker followed by a period for questions, discussion and comment.
3. Refreshments, during which time much useful general discussion can take place. Recruitment of new members is on entry or during refreshments. Some groups charge members and/or non-members for attending meetings.

Refreshments - A sensible amount should be charged for these and contributors should be financially recompensed at cost. Whole food refreshments are an obvious first choice. A very small profit is made.

Publicity and Information - This is extremely important. A major role of any Patients' Association is that of a disseminator of information. It is advantageous to have a publicity/information leaflet/brochure which can also have a membership application form attached or enclosed.

These can be left in shops, libraries, and information centres etc. Contact with the local media, TV, radio and the press should be made for editorial coverage and timely letters to them often stimulate interest. Printing/photocopying is an important factor and a search must be made for the most cost-effective method. Photocopying/computer generated being appropriate for small numbers and offset litho for longer print runs. It is important to present as professional appearance as possible with stationery, posters, leaflets etc. It is helpful if at least one member of the Committee is sufficiently knowledgeable and feels able to speak to other local clubs and associations on the subject of homeopathy. This

does much to spread the word about homoeopathy and additionally it publicises the Association.

Literature - Much free and inexpensive literature can be obtained from the various Manufacturers of homeopathic medicines. These should be approached for support and all available literature (approved by the Committee) should be displayed at each meeting in addition to that of the Association. Some patients' groups have their own library and/or book sales. The majority of publishers will give discounts to Associations.

Finances - Ideally annual subscriptions should be kept as low as practicable to encourage as many people as possible join but they also have to be realistic; many are currently in the range of 30 euros. Donations (possibly from manufacturers of homeopathic medicines) should be encouraged.

Other methods of raising funds will be necessary, e.g. admission charges to meetings can be varied to reflect membership of the Association (non-members pay more). Raffles, bring-and-buy sales, annual bazaar and many similar fund raising events should be considered. They also enable members to feel they are helping and are a good source of publicity as they attract more people.

Income also accrues from donations at promotional talks. Obviously the cost of the venue is a major factor but other expenses incurred will include printing/photocopying stationery, posters, membership cards, newsletters etc, postages, telephone, speakers' expenses and advertising.

Constitution - A Constitution should be drawn up as soon as possible after the initial public meeting of the Association. This is most desirable in order that everyone is quite clear as to the aims and rules of the group. Eventually, registration with the authorities will be necessary and this will vary in each European country and must be researched locally. Charity or club status is advisable to avoid tax liabilities. Professional advice will be needed at this point and with luck someone among the membership will be qualified to advise and will provide the information free of charge.

EFHPA would like to record its thanks to the National Association of Homeopathic Groups in the UK and to all who have contributed to the writing of this pamphlet.