



8 Use social prescribing

Practice based navigators

Practice Health Champions, Robin Lane Medical Centre, Leeds

Patients at the practice are invited to be trained as volunteer Health Champions. These engage with other patients, understand needs and organise activities. They run 19 different groups for patients, and support service delivery within the practice.

The idea

Robin Lane now works with more than 50 enthusiastic citizens who deliver 19 different kinds of groups and activities. As well as the plethora of champion-led social groups, the practice now runs a Ukulele group, provides 7 day a week breastfeeding support delivered by Champions, keeps a constantly updated dynamic directory of local services and resources and signposts and routes people to activities in the community.

Champions also support service delivery in many different ways including for example increasing the numbers of people attending Saturday flu clinic from 300 to over 800 people. “The Champions have enabled a lot of things to happen which wouldn't have been able to happen otherwise” (Linda Belderson, GP). “But the great story is that lives have been transformed, people are no longer isolated; they have made new friendships and use services differently” (Mev Forbes, Managing Partner).

Impact

The practice has increased their patient list by 57% from 8,500 to 13,000 patients without any increase in primary or secondary referrals and a 10% reduction in use of A&E. There is evidence of increased efficiency by dealing with failure demand. Over 50 volunteer Practice Health Champions work alongside the practice team. The practice have reconfigured their staff team and redesigned their offer to respond to the new challenges, choosing not to appoint to a vacant salaried GP post but instead choosing to invest in a Community Matron and a Wellbeing Coordinator. The Practice has evolved to do things differently – their identity has changed - they no longer describe themselves as a medical service and are rebranding as the Robin Lane Health and Wellbeing Centre

Implementation tips

The practice themselves have been surprised by the number of people in the community willing to become volunteers, as well as by the size of their impact. Evidence like this from other places can help with uncertainty in your own team.

Expert support with recruitment and training from Altogether Better has been helpful to the practice.

There is no fixed menu of things which Health Champions can do, so don't be afraid to go where the interest is, as well as trying new approaches to age-old challenges (eg loneliness, frequent attenders, health promotion uptake).

Link(s)

www.altogetherbetter.org.uk/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=36&mid=57&fileid=128