



9 Support self care

Support self care and management

Practice health champions, Oxford Terrace and Rawling Road Medical Group, Gateshead

Patients at the practice are invited to be trained as volunteer Health Champions. These engage with other patients, understand needs and organise activities.

The idea

The practice champions are volunteers who work with the practice to improve services. They support service improvement, run groups for patients and help connect the practice with local voluntary groups. The practice works with them in a collaborative way, with much of the champions work arising from their own ideas. They also provide a source of additional capacity to assist the practice in its health promotion and outreach work.

Sheinaz Stansfield, the practice manager, reports “this has completely changed our relationship with patients and the third sector. They are now equal partners in service redesign and planning. However, they are also a key asset to the social prescribing work we do,”.

Impact

The majority of champions have enduring mental health problems. They used to take up significant GP resource, but they are now running self-help groups, working contributing to other community services and living more independent lives. They make fewer appointments with the GP.

The practice manager reports that working with the champions has made it easier for the practice to encourage patients with social issues to turn to the community rather than the GP.

Dr Caroline Snell, GP, admits to initial reservations about Practice Health Champions but is now supportive. “I wondered how many patients would be interested because its a huge commitment. But its been a success. My regular patients have had great support and theyre coming to see me less and less.

I now have options for signposting people, especially those with mental health problems. We have groups for befrienders, knitters, readers...all run by champions. With lack of resources and, increasingly, lack of GPs, we have to encourage self-care.”

Implementation tips

Its OK to start small with this kind of work, and allow things to grow organically. Its very important to allow volunteers themselves to contribute ideas, shape priorities and, ultimately, choose what they want to do - but prepare to be pleasantly surprised at the practicality of their interest.

Practice staff can help with recruiting champions, but often the champions themselves are the best recruiters, along with other voluntary groups in the local community.

Link(s)

www.togetherbetter.org.uk/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=4&mid=112&fileid=117