



Self Care the St Lawrence Way

Of course no one likes to be ill, but it happens. And, if it does, and self care isn't an option then you want to visit a surgery with a friendly efficient primary care team in pleasant surroundings. St Lawrence Surgery in West Worthing has both. There you will find dedicated staff serving the local community in a building that is light and airy, with paintings from local artists adorning the walls.

The primary care team at St Lawrence consists of 9 GPs, 3 - 4 trainee doctors, 7 nurses and 15 reception/admin staff. The addition of an in-house pharmacy means the pharmacist is on hand to offer self care advice on over the counter medicines, as well as help and advice on medicines use, blood pressure monitoring and smoking cessation.

Overseeing the complex needs of 13,500 patients is Jo Wadey, an extremely enthusiastic practice manager. The surgery is made extra special because of the hard work of members of the patient participation group (PPG). Headed by PPG Chair Bob Barden, members, who meet 7 or 8 times a year, give their time freely. As well as being Self Care Champion for the practice, Chris Moon-Willems is the external liaison co-ordinator for the PPG.

St Lawrence Surgery is also a model of self care excellence.

Self Care Aspiration

Jo and Chris are the driving force behind the surgery's self care aspiration. After being fired up by the Self Care Forum's Annual Self Care Conference in November 2012, Jo and Chris put their heads together to devise ways in which the practice could engage its patients into taking better care of themselves at home.

With an emphasis on patient empowerment, the practice is attempting to better inform their patients of what they can do to look after their own health and their family's health without the need for medical intervention. As well as improving her patient's health literacy, Jo is acutely aware of the gains self care brings in terms of managing demand, ensuring appropriate use of consultation time with GPs and nurses.

Commitment and consistency

Implementing a self care strategy needs total commitment from every staff member. Consistency is also vital, says Jo. It is no good, for example, having a policy on no antibiotics for viral sore throats when some nurses and GPs adhere to the policy and others don't! Patients will 'nurse or doctor shop' until they get the antibiotics they believe they need, which causes more appointments being taken up inappropriately.

Having everyone understand their role in implementing the self care strategy can be done through a practice meeting. Discussing and agreeing the strategy has to involve all those that interact with patients at the surgery, including receptionists, nurses, the pharmacist and the GPs, according to Jo. And, when a GP colleague said it was light relief to see a patient with an ear infection during a busy day of serious illnesses, it was also an opportunity for Jo to point out that it is imperative patients

gain timely and appropriate advice from the right health care professional, enabling better access to GPs for patients that need them. Further strengthening the importance of having a self care strategy in place!

Self Care Tools

Having self care tools and information sources available for surgery staff to direct patients is vital.

The Self Care Forum, the national agency responsible for promoting the importance of better self care, reports there are 57 million consultations involving a minor ailment and 90% of these consultations end in a prescription, costing the NHS £2bn in GP time and prescription costs. Most ingredients for minor ailments are available, relatively cheaply, over the counter but further research suggests doctors end their consultations with a prescription. The reason for this is because patients expect it, and doctors want to preserve the doctor-patient relationship.

To stop this, the Self Care Forum produced fact sheets for ten of the most common minor ailments. Designed ideally for a shared conversation between the patient and the health professional, the fact sheets are an alternative to the prescription when patients present with the symptoms of minor ill health. The difference with these leaflets is they include normal duration of symptoms and red flags.

It's hoped the shared conversation between the patient and health professional will result in a more confident patient, who understands the normal duration of symptoms and is better equipped to take care of these symptoms at home when they appear again.

The fact sheets are a major part of the strategy to educate St Lawrence's patients on self care for minor ill health. The surgery has made them available via the website and in printed format, so surgery staff can easily guide people to these. Practice staff also made themselves aware of the normal duration of symptoms for when patients call the surgery.

A Resourceful Website

Jo and Chris strongly advocate the importance of a resourceful website. And, the St Lawrence website is a fountain of knowledge for patients. People can use it to book appointments on line, order repeat prescriptions, find out about clinics and read St Lawrence's latest annual report. The Self Care Forum's fact sheets are available on a page entitled "Take control – manage your symptoms" which highlights the importance of patients understanding how to take care of their minor ill health at home.

There is a wealth of other information on the website, including details of St Lawrence's regular patient health education events on areas of issue to patients such as back health, diabetes management and cancer detection.

St Lawrence's Practice Participation Group

There is no mistaking that St Lawrence is clearly a practice that goes the extra mile in looking after patients holistically. Chris says that by focusing on people's well being and empowering them to look after their own health, it will have a positive impact on illnesses such as depression for example. She said "the PPG is changing, meetings are no longer about fund raising, though this is important,

members now want to improve patient's well being through events and with more support for self care."

People's well being is certainly being looked after by the PPG which has arranged everything from coffee mornings to choir practice to pilates classes! And a walking club, named the St Lawrence's Strollers meet weekly with four PPG members having undergone volunteer health leaders training and first aid courses to ensure the walks are managed safely and expertly.

There is no doubting that St Lawrence's PPG is a force to be reckoned with and Chris believes it is important to make everything as accessible as possible; a buddy-scheme initiative is being planned to have computer literate locals teaching other, not-so computer savvy locals, the basics of computer use.

Newsletters

St Lawrence also updates patients through their bi-monthly newsletter which is circulated to 2,400 patients via email. Available in hard copy in the surgery's waiting room, it is also pinned to the external notice board. And, since it would be foolish to ignore social media these days, the surgery is also on face book and twitter, regularly updating "friends" on surgery news such as the next pilates class or "strollers" walk.

And again, for those that don't have computers, the surgery reaches house-bound patients at Christmas with cards which include the December newsletter, asking patients to get in touch for news about forthcoming events and surgery activities.

Spreading the message

Jo is keen to spread the message about encouraging self care and has made several presentations, one to the locality's patient reference group, which is the patient panel for the CCG. Feedback, she said, was positive.

She has also contacted all 96 practice managers in West Sussex, explaining the surgery's self care strategy and has received responses from colleagues keen to emulate her initiative.

E-Learning Course

Also as part of the self care strategy, two GPs at St Lawrence completed the ¹RCGP's online course for minor ailments and the practice is hoping more of their GPs will sit the free course produced to help GPs become self care aware. She felt nurse practitioners would also benefit from the course, which has recently been updated by the CPPE to include pharmacy training.

Funding

And, the beauty about implementing a self care strategy is that it doesn't need extra funding, says Jo. What it does need is engagement from the surgery staff. Chris confirmed that St Lawrence's doctors and nurses did engagement really well! She added "there will always be the can-dos and the can't dos, the can dos will always find reasons to do it while the can't dos will find reasons not to!"

¹ <http://www.selfcareforum.org/resources/rcgp-e-learning-course/>

Jo said that whilst St Lawrence has not yet evaluated the self care strategy, it is a good way to manage demand in the surgery. Other practices she said, have methods such as telephone triage whereby every single patient is triaged. Doctors ring patients back and decide whether a visit to the surgery is necessary, thereby filtering out patients that don't require a consultation in person.

Chris believes instead of empowering people, this does the opposite, encouraging a paternalistic relationship between doctor and patient, and she added, it certainly isn't favoured by patients.

Self Care Continued

St Lawrence surgery will continue to be a self care surgery, driving the self care message forward. Jo and Chris have already begun to think of new ideas to freshen the strategy; by tailoring patient education events to the fact sheets to give extra information to those patients that attend the surgery with minor ailments. Fever in young children with their health visitor leading the session would be extremely popular Jo said.

New Projects

Jo Wadey and Chris Moon are refreshing individuals! They love new projects and their enthusiasm and exuberance lead them to embrace innovation and get things done! They plan to promote campaigns such as Self Care Week, Patient Participation Week and anything else that has the potential to enrich and improve the lives of their local community.

Perhaps they'll hold another of their open days with a focus on health and fun; with face painting, magicians and discos for the children. And for the adults, coffee and cake and free health checks with "Street Doctor" and "Street Nurse". Or perhaps another rejuvenating tai chi class will be the order of the day.

The only barrier Jo and Chris have found to implementing a self care strategy, is the barrier of time – they are having trouble fitting everything in!

National Awards

St Lawrence has clearly been marked as an inspirational surgery and in 2011 was short listed for two awards at the General Practice Awards 2011 Ceremony and finalists in the National GP Surgery Awards. Jo was recognised for her work and shortlisted as Practice Manager of the year. And, in November 2011, St Lawrence Surgery won the Community Stars Health Heroes Award. This fabulous surgery is not only a self care model of excellence, but it is also a surgery of excellence and deserves a cabinet worth of trophies for their efforts in serving the local community.

<http://www.stlawrencesurgery-worthing.nhs.uk/>

Jo and Chris were interviewed by Libby Whittaker of the Self Care Forum in May 2013.