

Green Bank Surgery, Warrington

Case study conducted 17 11 10

The staff at Green Bank Surgery, Warrington, work closely with the community to find out what services they need to stay well and self-care.

Dr Andrew Davies, principle partner at Green Bank, describes the practice's patient population as largely suffering "mixed deprivation... and many are over 75". It is important, therefore, to be in tune with their needs, to help these people self-care for both minor ailments and long term conditions.

The practice reaches out to the community in different ways, to try to engage as many people as possible. Staff interact with the practice's patient forum and pick up ideas from patients about which services would be helpful to them. Staff also feed self-care messages into the forum through discussion and the practice notice boards.

To look at GP behaviour around self-care, last summer GPs at a cluster of practices in the Warrington area decided to carry out an audit of prescribing for throat infections. This was designed to ensure that patients were receiving a consistent message from GPs, as well as deal with high attendance by patients on day one of their sore throat.

All GPs recorded consultations involving throat complaints and recommended self-care in the first instance. They also asked specific questions like "have you tried OTC medicines already?" There are plans to re-audit in the new year to look at quantifying patient behaviour changes, but Dr Davies says that he has already seen a shift in attitudes of patients and is now not seeing as many inappropriate sore throat consultations.

The audit has also seen a change in doctor attitudes to self-care, as Dr Davies observes that previously some doctors were reluctant to advise patients to self-care, wanting to solve the problem themselves. However, the audit helped GPs to become accustomed to the idea, meaning that now patients are getting a consistent message about self care throughout participating practices. Dr Davies says this is crucial if patients are going to take the idea on board. To increase consistency of message further, practices in the area are collaborating to develop a cohesive set of leaflets.

To find out how to help people with long term conditions self-care, the practice conducted a lot of work in the community with people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). This revealed that COPD sufferers were keen to self-care but needed facilities to help them. They wanted to be able to access advice through a 24 hour COPD helpline as this would prevent them having to call an ambulance, make an emergency appointment at the surgery, or call the out of hours doctor.

Green Bank has started to set this helpline up in conjunction with a local hospital, where phone calls will go through to a nursing team, able to give advice.

Practice staff also attend meetings of neighbourhood boards that operate in the area and listen to their recommendations for taking self-care advice out into the community. One idea that Green Bank took on was to create health and wellbeing advisers. These advisers are volunteers trained by a paid coordinator. They go to pubs, job centres and visit social housing properties to look at peoples' health needs and give health and lifestyle advice. Crucially, they also signpost people to services that operate in the area, to make sure people know how to access the correct service for them.

In the future, the practice aims to encourage people to make more use of services in the community, in particular, to visit the pharmacist for advice on minor ailments. Reception staff have already started to do this, triaging people who come in for emergency appointments to the appropriate health care professional, to the pharmacist or to self-care. By targeting people in their communities and looking at GP attitudes to self-care, the practice has been able to implement innovative schemes to encourage self-care for both minor ailments and long term conditions.