

Nuffield Road Medical Centre, Cambridge

Case study conducted on 13 10 10

At Nuffield Road Medical Centre, Cambridge, encouraging self-care in patients is a team effort in which clinical and admin staff all have important roles.

Practice manager Greta Evans is keen to stress that promoting self-care is not just a job for clinical staff and is leading from the front. Greta gives up much of her free time to lead walking groups into the surrounding countryside as part of CHIP (Cambridgeshire Health Improvement Programme). Other components of the programme include 'Weigh 2 Go' for weight loss, a movement and mobility class, and one-to-one sessions with a specialist health trainer.

Receptionists also help to run some of the practical aspects of the programme and are in charge of the creative side, publicising national health weeks, services in the area and general health advice as well as CHIP.

GPs refer patients to CHIP, but this is where their involvement ends. The patients prefer it that way, as consultations often just consist of what is 'wrong' with the patient, whereas involvement in CHIP focuses on what the patient is doing 'right'.

GP Mike Knapton cites the benefits of being able to refer patients to services within the practice and has noticed increasingly happy and healthy patients "and that's what gets us out of bed in the morning".

Dr Knapton's work at the British Heart Foundation has made this practice aware of how self-care of minor ailments can result in self-care of long term illnesses, and many aspects of CHIP aim to address general health and lifestyle self-care in order to prepare patients for long term illnesses in the future. This is particularly relevant for the practice's ageing patients, who make up a large part of the population.

CHIP gives power back to the patient and lets them believe they can make a difference to their health. However, it is not suitable for all patients (the uptake of CHIP initiatives is mainly by over-45s) which is where the other clinical staff come in.

The strong, proactive nursing force at the practice sees communication as key to self-care of minor ailments, of which they have seen an increasing number in recent years. Practice nurse Angie Carpenter says that she has recently noticed an unwillingness in adults to do any self-care at all, even with simple cuts and burns. She says this makes education about self-care an even stronger priority at the practice as this behaviour is not sustainable for the future.

Nurse practitioner Marion Saunders attributes the increasing number of minor ailments consultations she sees to low self esteem, particularly in young people and young mothers. Marion uses every opportunity to build confidence in her patients and feels that if a patient goes away knowing how to solve a problem, “that is not a wasted appointment”.

Through teaching, the nurses know they can use the power of communication to reach more people. Taking the time to reassure one young mother that her child is not seriously ill will empower her to inform other young mothers of the danger signs and symptoms she has learned about. Similarly, the nurses themselves are keen to keep up a discourse with contemporaries about services and resources in the area that patients can be redirected to.

The staff at Nuffield Road Medical Centre are able to tailor their self-care advice to different patient groups in order to reach as many people as possible. It is understood at the practice that self-care has very personal guidelines, and that people need to be educated to understand what is an appropriate level of self-care for them. Every person with a different medical history or condition should understand what they can deal with at home, and what should prompt them to visit the surgery.