

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING IN THE BLACKDOWN HILLS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY? CONFERENCE

FRIDAY 26 JANUARY 2018

SUMMARY OF EVENT

Introduction

We are incredibly lucky in the Blackdown Hills where there have been close working relationships between the healthcare services, those involved in social care and voluntary sector organisations for many years. This has put us in an excellent position as interest has grown in the concept of “social prescribing”. This term can mean different things but the basic principle is that “people who lead happy and active social lives enjoy better health than those who do not”.

Medication and healthcare interventions for specific conditions or health problems will always be needed, but social prescribing is a more holistic approach to care where other factors e.g. access to family, friends, social networks as well as community wide issues such as housing and transport can influence someone’s well-being. A system where health, social care and/or voluntary organisations are working together rather than in isolation facilitates primary care professionals referring patients with social, emotional or practical needs to a range of local, non-clinical services.

Therefore we held an event in the Blackdown Hills to understand the contribution that organisations in the area can make to social prescribing; where there are perhaps gaps in services and which we felt, collectively, were the most important gaps to address and how.

We had a fantastic turnout for the event with a diverse mix of people from the community, voluntary organisations, charities, care homes, parish, district and county councils, health and social careⁱ. We were also very fortunate to have Dr Michael Dixon, the national clinical lead for social prescribing, introducing the day and participating throughout.

Workshops

As expected there were many activities that could be considered under the auspices of social prescribing in the Blackdown Hills. These included lunch clubs and coffee mornings, community group focussing on different ages and needs, singing and panto groups, befriending schemes, mentoring services, village agents, exercise groups and facilities, messy church, woodlander projects including “forest bathing”, gardening groups, the WI, art groupsⁱⁱ.

Thinking about all that is currently available, the gaps in social prescribing activities were identified and from this the top three areas were highlighted as priorities for action.

These were:

- The need for a way to communicate services that are available and signposting people to these services.
- Secure funding to enable communication and co-ordination between organisations providing social prescribing activities so projects can be developed together.
- Identification of who needs help and what help they require.

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Those attending the day felt that conference had been very useful simply by meeting people from different organisations involved in social prescribing, sharing each other's knowledge of existing services/activities, understanding the gaps and priorities, developing co-operative relationships, generating ideas and seeing things from different and fresh perspectivesⁱⁱⁱ.

Individuals took actions away with them to take forward within their own sphere of influence and some collective actions were agreed.

Actions/Next steps

1. Establish, utilising some of the existing resources e.g. pinpoint Devon, a community signposting service where local people can access information and support from social prescribing activities in the Blackdown Hills.
2. Develop a paid co-ordinator/link worker role to facilitate people accessing social prescribing services and activities in the Blackdown Hills and/or provide direct support for people's health and well-being.
3. Work with Involve Mid Devon to determine sources of funding for the above.

Other outcomes

- As part of developing a co-ordinated social prescribing network, there must be a way of capturing the social help that is needed in the community.
- A number of organisations agreed to participate in the Life Chances - social prescribing peer research with Devon County Council.
- A follow up event (when there is something to report) was felt to be beneficial.

Thank you to all those involved in organising the event and those participating in the day

ⁱ Organisations represented - Action East Devon, Age UK - Mid Devon, The Blackdown Healthy Living and Activity Centre, The Blackdown Hills AONB, The Blackdown Practice, The Blackdown Support Group, College Surgery Partnership, The Culm Valley Hub Club, Devon County Council, Hemyock Baptist Church, Hummingbird Nursing Home, Involve Mid Devon, Neroche Woodlanders, Patient, Somerset Community Foundation, Somerset County Council, St Mary's Church, Taunton Dean Borough Council, TRIP Community Transport, Walking for Health, Wellington Dementia Action Alliance, Westbank Community Health & Care

ⁱⁱ A full list of the activities and services identified is available from the conference organisers; please contact Michelle Hamilton-Kendall at Hemyock Surgery.

ⁱⁱⁱ Feedback from the conference has been summarised and is available from the conference organisers; please contact Michelle Hamilton-Kendall at Hemyock Surgery.