

NHS Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group
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Re: Freedom of Information Request

Thank you for your request for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which was received into this office on 30th September 2018.

You Asked for:

I am interested in the scientific status of social prescribing. Could you provide me with empirical data that suggests that it leads to better health outcomes than alternatives such as conventional prescribing/ referrals to specialists?

Our Response:

Thank you for your enquiry related to social prescribing. As you are aware social prescribing is a way of linking patients in primary care with sources of support within the community to help improve their health and well-being. Importantly social prescribing is an additional offer that does not replace conventional prescribing or referral to specialists when those options are appropriate.

The evidence base for social prescribing is growing. The Wirral Intelligence Service conducted a review of the evidence base for social prescribing in 2015. At that time, this review concluded that the evidence on the impact of social prescribing was currently limited and inconsistent. However, some initiatives have shown improved outcomes for patients and potential for cost-savings. The review also recommended that any Wirral social prescribing initiatives should aim to add to the current evidence base and be evaluated.

Since 2015 there has been a strong push to promote social prescribing nationally. NHS England is encouraging all Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) to work with their local partners to commission one-stop social prescribing schemes in their areas. Social prescribing is also included as one of the 10 high impact actions within the General Practice Forward View.

The evidence related to the impact of social prescribing has developed since 2015. Social prescribing is affecting GP consultation rates, A&E attendance, hospital stays, medication use, and social care. The University of Westminster led an evidence review looking at the impact of social prescribing on demand for NHS Healthcare (conducted in 2017). They found an average of 28% fewer GP consultations and 24% fewer A&E attendances, where social prescribing 'connector' services are working well.

In addition there is growing evidence that patients feel positively about social prescribing. A recent qualitative study which involved interviewing participants of a social prescribing scheme in Newcastle found that the scheme promoted feelings of control and self-confidence, reduced social isolation and had a positive impact on health-related behaviours including weight loss, healthier eating and increased physical activity.

Citizens Advice Wirral and Age UK Wirral have recently been supported by the Department of Health to develop a Wirral social prescribing scheme in partnership with NHS Wirral CCG and Wirral Council. This scheme is currently funded by the Department of Health. We will be evaluating the impact of this scheme in terms of improving patient outcomes, patient experience and cost-effectiveness

We hope this information is useful, however if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Corporate Affairs Team (contact details at the top of this letter)