

Health Inequalities—Case Study

YOURhealth Coach for Inpatient Units - Nov 2023

Identifying the Issue

There are significant health inequalities for those living with severe mental illness, learning disabilities and/or autism when compared to the general population; average life expectancy is 15-20 years shorter. The higher rates of obesity found in these groups poses a particularly significant physical health inequality with an increased risk of several chronic diseases.

'People with SMI are 3 times more likely to smoke, have double the risk of obesity and diabetes and a higher risk of cardiovascular issues. The shorter life expectancy is due to the lack of support, including health information and prevention interventions, gaps in training and a lack of confidence in the workforce to carry out physical health checks' (NHS England).

The service recognised this high profile national issue and the significant impact it was having on the inpatient population living with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and patient / carer feedback indicated this was also an area needing development. The service had ambitions to address this but did not have the capacity to drive this forward. The service responsively developed a pilot project, based on the well established and successful Health Trainers / Coaches provision. YOURhealth Coaches for Inpatient Units was instigated to support the healthy lifestyles of those admitted to a Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trusts inpatient wards, directly addressing health inequalities faced by those living with Severe Mental Illness (SMI).

Making the Change

YOURhealth Coaches for Inpatient Units is a newly funded pilot project (commenced April 2023 for 1 year initially) aimed at supporting patients with their physical health, initially focusing on completing a Health Improvement Profiles (HIPs) with each patient. This provides a holistic assessment of physical health with tests focusing on Body Mass Index (BMI), Blood Pressure, Cholesterol and Glucose readings as well as answering questions related to their current lifestyle.

Patients are offered support with anything that will benefit their physical health such as:

- . Healthy eating
- . Exercises
- . Caffeine reduction
- . Sleep hygiene
- . Signposting to specialist health services e.g. smoking cessation

Intervention Examples:

- . Health Improvement Profiles
- . 1-1 support for healthy lifestyles
- . Group support for healthy lifestyles
- . Discharge pathways & ongoing support

Since the beginning of the project, various focus areas have been identified within inpatient units such as; access to fruit and vegetables, exercise, smoking and vaping to name a few. A number of patients have either been referred to additional services for support or to the YOURhealth Coach. Alongside this patients in PICU have also requested the support of the YOURhealth Coach for healthy eating.

The YOURhealth Coach recognised the need to provide a flexible service to initiate interest and engagement at an early stage. They have attended numerous Narrative Therapy group sessions with a Clinical Psychologist as well as leading exercise sessions supported by the Inpatient Units. This will continue as part of the longer term plan to improve access to patients so that they can keep physically active on the units. The Health Coach has also had discussions with inpatient wards regarding trying to improve access to healthy meals.

Impact

- Since April 2023 when the pilot began, 109 Patients in total have accessed Step 1 Interventions (Physical Health Checks—height, weight, blood pressure etc.) and 120 Patients have accessed Step 2 Interventions (Healthy Lifestyle conversations and ongoing support). This shows positive uptake across all three units.
- The breakdown of these is as follows across our inpatient units;
 - Mill View Court (Mixed Unit) – 31 Part 1, 28 Part 2
 - Westlands (Female Unit) – 44 Part 1, 51 Part 2
 - Newbridges (Male Unit) – 34 Part 1, 41 Part 2
- Anecdotally, staff within inpatients have reported an increase in their knowledge and understanding regarding the importance of physical health and lifestyle for this patient group.

Learning

- This pilot has demonstrated the importance of practitioners taking a **person-led approach, investing time building trust and rapport**. This in turn supports and **facilitates engagement and motivation** around physical health interventions.
- This flexible approach **meets patients where they are at**, allowing them to progress their understanding of their Physical Health and take action moving through Pre-contemplation to Contemplation and beyond (as per Prochaska and DiClemente's Stages of Change Model, 1983).
- The pilot evidences the importance of **responsively adapting service provision** to meet the needs of patient populations, particularly where health inequalities are prevalent.
- A pilot itself is a great way to 'test' an idea and also evidences to patients, carers and staff that **we are being responsive to feedback**. Pilot projects like this allow us to **develop and expand our services**, hopefully securing future sustainable funding.
- **Collaborative working** is key to supporting this patient group; as patients transition from inpatients to community services, the Health Coach is uniquely positioned to ensure they are linked in with the right services for discharge to continue their positive health journey. This will hopefully have a positive impact on their mental health in the future too.

Feedback

'I would first like to express my gratitude for the opportunity of letting me shadow you. The experience was very helpful, and I learned a great deal about the assessment process. You were very informative and patient. You explained the assessment in detail and walked me through taking notes, and also answered my questions clearly and concisely. Also, being able to observe you assess patients, and take history from them was very helpful too. Overall, I am grateful for the opportunity of being able to shadow you. I learned a great deal about HIP assessments, and I am confident that this experience will be helpful for me in my future career.'

- Junior Doctor

'Hi, my name is Michelle, and I would just like to say that the health check I had with Matt was great and such a good idea. I have been coming into these units for many years and to have my blood checked and to know I am not suffering any undue health risks was a real positive for my mental health. Matt was professional and friendly and made me feel at ease. It would be nice to see more exercise classes planned on the units... I hope this new health check remains in place.'*

- Patient *pseudonym used for anonymity purposes

Next Steps

- Provide support across all inpatient units within Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust.
- Support the Quit Together Programme for smoking cessation.
- Training around behaviour change and motivational interviewing.
- Progress work with the Recovery College.
- Develop a discharge pack for patients which will include key services for support.
- A YOURhealth Coach in Community Mental Health Teams to provide continued support upon discharge for better results with improving health outcomes.
- To review data gathered around outcomes from the pilot.
- Explore opportunities to work with the Involvement Lead to review patient and carer experiences and further develop the offering to increase uptake.
- Working on a Business Case to secure further funding for the project.