



Pharmacists convince men to take health seriously

Mark Pilling, acting deputy head of medicines management, Knowsley PCT, Merseyside

MEN'S HEALTH CHECK SERVICE

Research has shown that men in general aren't comfortable talking about their health, don't go to the doctor soon enough and are less likely to access health services than women. In Knowsley the PCT piloted a health check scheme aimed at men aged 50-65 who hadn't had a health check from a GP or nurse in the last 12 months. Local pharmacies offered these men a free health check to look for signs of serious long-term health problems such as diabetes and heart disease, as well as giving them lifestyle advice to help prevent these conditions.

In Knowsley, Merseyside, men die an average of 3.5 years younger than the average life expectancy of 76.5 in England and live more years with debilitating long-term conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

"For the men we wanted to reach, making a doctor's appointment was a stumbling block – they weren't used to seeing a doctor unless they had symptoms of illness, and by this time it

had often become serious. We believed that pharmacists were in a good position to offer these men health checks which could be done without an appointment," says Mark Pilling, acting deputy head of medicines management at Knowsley PCT.

Men aged 50-65 were the main target as this is the age when early signs of diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other health conditions often start to appear. Men of this age are also least likely to see their doctor.

The year-long pilot that the scheme ran in eight pharmacies from January 2006 was so successful that the service is now on-going and expanding.

HOW THE SERVICE WORKS

Men can either have the health check done immediately or make an appointment with the pharmacist. "The ideal is for it to be done there and then – once the patient is out of the door, they might not return," says Mark.

The free check-up takes 20-25 minutes and includes:

- Blood pressure measurement.
- Finger pin-prick sample of blood taken to check cholesterol and blood glucose levels.
- BMI and waist measurement.
- Lifestyle assessment (advice on smoking, alcohol, exercise, diet).

The results are then analysed by a computer and the pharmacist will explain what implications these have for the patient's health. The results are then sent to his GP (with consent) and the patient may be referred for further tests if necessary. Men are also given advice on diet, alcohol consumption, stopping smoking and taking exercise.

10 pharmacies in Knowsley are currently involved in the scheme, around a third of the pharmacies in the area.



HOW SUCCESSFUL IS THE SERVICE?

The service has so far screened around 400 men in the year of the pilot across the 10 pharmacies. “Our evaluation survey showed that 96 per cent of the men said they’d made at least one lifestyle change as a result of the check-up and for 65 per cent, getting health advice from their pharmacy was a new experience.

“Almost 100 per cent of the patients said they were either very or quite likely to attend a follow-up health check and would recommend the checks to other men,” explains Mark.

The survey also found that 77 per cent of the men were overweight or obese, 16 per cent were smokers and 77 per cent drank at least 35 units of alcohol a week. Some 65 per cent had blood glucose readings greater than 5.5 per cent and 32 per cent of men had cholesterol readings higher than five.

The interest and demand for the service as a result of the pilot enabled the age range to be extended to 40-75 years and is available to women who ask for it too. “I think what’s so important about the service is that it reaches people who wouldn’t otherwise have seen their doctor unless they had symptoms,” says Mark.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

The local GPs are happy with the service and believe it will benefit patients who wouldn’t otherwise come to see them. “The results go to the patient’s GP who can then consider adding them to their records,” says Mark. “The service contributes to the PCT’s priority of reducing the incidence of heart disease and obesity and improving the general health of older men.”

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

“The men’s health check scheme is proving that pharmacists and their staff can make a significant improvement to the health of people in their community. They can promote public health and also play an important role in preventive healthcare as well as referring patients on to other health services too,” concludes Mark.

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