

Making a difference



The 'GP Champions' project shows there's considerable potential in bringing together young people, GPs and the voluntary sector to find new ways to help improve young people's health. Frances Perrow explains more

School nurses are fully aware of the importance of keeping young people healthy and have first-hand experience of dealing with the specific problems in this age group.

But nationally, adolescents have the smallest 'patient voice', they are the least satisfied with visits to their GP and The Lancet reported there have been 'no significant health improvements' in this age group, compared to others.

Adolescent health

We know that adolescence is a critical time for health, when risk-taking begins and young people experiment with alcohol, smoking, drugs and sex. It's also the stage when serious long-term conditions may present for the first time. Added to that, the effects of poor healthcare or the impact of good healthcare in adolescence can last a lifetime.

These factors have been the driving force behind a project run by charities the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH) and Youth Access along with the Royal College of GPs' Adolescent Health Group. With funding for three years from the Department of Health, the partners have developed the 'GP Champions for Youth Health Project', which aims to find new ways of meeting health needs for this age group.

Frances Perrow,
project lead,
The Association
for Young People's
Health

Pilot projects

Ten pilot sites have been set up around the country, each with a lead GP practice, coupled with a voluntary sector organisation which provides information and counselling services to young people.

The sites in Liverpool, Washington Tyne and Wear, Bristol, Southampton, Brighton, Sheffield, Manchester, Cornwall and two in London, are exploring the advantages of sharing experience, ideas and service delivery. They are also trying to get funding from (CCGs) under the new commissioning arrangements.

Each pilot site is working with young people to find out their views about current health provision as well as finding out what they would really like to see commissioned.

In some cases young people want their GP practice to be more accessible to young people and appointments easier to make. In others, they want GP 'pop-up' services in colleges or their youth centre.

The sites are also looking at the problems faced by hard-to-reach young people in accessing primary healthcare. Ex-offenders and the homeless cannot even register with a GP if they haven't got an address, so our pilots are looking at this issue and working with the local healthcare bodies to find a solution.

Positive engagement

The results, over half-way into our 'GP Champions' project, are proving exciting.

One of the biggest achievements so far has been getting GP practices and the voluntary sector working together. The GP practices say they are benefitting in many ways. They are learning about all the excellent voluntary sector services in the local area and some have started referring young people to their partner organisation for counselling under new pathways. Young people have been 'training' GPs on better ways to listen and help them and have been getting involved on Practice Patient Panels. The voluntary sector's experience of engaging young people and building relationships with them via text and messaging, has also helped GPs in reducing 'Do Not Attend' cases.

Improving access

In Bristol, our voluntary sector partner Off the Record has set up an Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service in the GP practice to create a seamless process for patients between referral and treatment.

The voluntary sector partners are learning from the GPs about the referral and commissioning issues and have worked together to raise the profile of young



This article was first published in the January 2014 issue of the *Journal of School and Public Health Nursing*

SAPHNA

Journal of School and
Public Health Nursing

people's health needs. In Southampton the organisation No Limits and their partner GP have jointly presented to the CCG. In Washington, the pilot partners secured a slot to talk to 300 GPs about young people's well-being at a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) event in Sunderland's Stadium of Light. Convincing GPs about the importance of young people's health is vital to the success of the project and future improvements in care.

In Liverpool, the project partners have worked together to win an innovation grant from the CCG to develop a health drop-in at the Young Persons Advisory Service, with funding to equip a clinical room and provide a GP and practice nurse one day a week, for a year.

In Cornwall, where there is a scattered, rural population, the 'GP Champions' pilot site is taking a different approach, trying out one-to-one online consultations via social media.

All the models of innovation and joint practice are being evaluated and will be brought together in a toolkit for national roll-out in 2015.

The 'GP Champions' project is proving that there is considerable potential in bringing together young people, GPs and the voluntary sector to find new ways of providing services, with the ultimate goal of improving young people's health.

To find out more about the project visit www.ayph.org.uk or find us on twitter at #gpchamps

School nurses often have occasion to refer young people to their GP for additional support and care; past experiences have not always been positive. This project will not only serve to improve access, quality and health outcomes for young people but also support development of an effective partnership between school nursing and GPs, in responding to young people's health issues.

Sharon White, professional officer, SAPHNA

