

Supporting patients with leg ulcers and target loneliness



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Community teams are a crucial part of healthcare provision in West Wiltshire, supporting people to stay in their own homes and live as independently as possible. The teams link closely with GPs and the acute sector to support discharge as soon as it is safe to do so.

Since 2011, Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has been working with commissioners and colleagues in primary care to further strengthen these teams to support the delivery of Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)'s strategy to align community services alongside primary care, improving the support that can be collectively provided to patients.

During 2014, under the Directly Enhanced Service Level Agreement 'Vulnerable to Hospital Admission' initiative, Bradford on Avon and Melksham Health Partnership (BoAMHP) identified around 400 patients who are now being jointly managed through a multidisciplinary team approach, while engaging with community teams, adult social care, primary care mental health services and the voluntary sectors. These individuals are having their clinical needs met, and there is an increased recognition of the effect loneliness has on their mental wellbeing. This is being tackled through the Leg Club® model, as well as a new local 'befriending' service set up by the local Mayor and the Seniors Forum.

In October 2014, BoAMHP became one of only three 'Demonstrator' sites in Wiltshire to develop the integration model. The plan is that the CCG as commissioner, in partnership with Great Western Hospitals, Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership and Wiltshire Council Social Care, will develop a model of care that fits with its out-of-hospital plan, as described in its five-year strategy. It will also work closely with local community and wider voluntary sector groups and agencies. The Bradford on Avon Leg Club is the hub of this new project in West Wiltshire through its social model that enables other services to co-exist in the same accommodation space and the same members to use this range of services.

The Leg Club only opened in February 2014, funded by the BoAMHP and through generous charitable donations from the local League of Friends.

The Club now has over 200 members and continues to grow every week. It was the first Leg Club in the country to be led by a GP practice with the care being delivered by Specialist Leg Ulcer Nurses, Practice Nurses and Health Care Assistants. A group of 10 volunteers, who form the committee, help with refreshments and sell raffle tickets.

The GPs are seeing and reporting an improvement in the mental wellbeing and healing rates of the patients treated in the Leg Club as they develop friendships which, in turn, often leads to them becoming fully integrated into their community. BoAMHP is keen for the Club to develop further and integrate other services into the same space — i.e. during the flu season, the Club vaccinated over 40 patients who would have otherwise had to make an appointment with the GP surgery. Meanwhile, the popular creative walks and art activities programme (led by an Arts Participation Consultant) is gathering pace. It encompasses the organisation of walks along the canal each week in conjunction with 'Get Walking Wiltshire', enabling physical activity for those who would not normally have the confidence to go outside.

As of January 2015, a Foot Care Practitioner will visit the Bradford on Avon Leg Club every 3 weeks to provide chiropody services to members at a reduced rate compared to attending a private podiatrist. This will meet the needs of people who are unable to access the local NHS service due to long waiting lists. Good nail care is also crucial to preventing patients from falling. A 'slipper exchange' will be available from the new year, which is important at this time of year, not only from a falls prevention perspective, but also keeping older people warm and healthy in the cold. A 'Falls Prevention' exercise class through Health Active will be offered from February for all members. While the community team is to identify patients from their caseload who could benefit from joining the Leg Club.

A Christmas party held in December welcomed over 70 members, volunteers and staff, while for the Club's first birthday party in February, the wonderful CitySound Choir performed for members in St Margaret's Hall, Bradford on Avon. Interest in the GP model of Leg Clubs is growing. A GP-led Club opened in Frome in October 2014 with another due to be opened in Westbury in early 2015.

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