

Stockwell – Clinicians taking the lead

BACKGROUND

Social prescribing in Lambeth went live in December 2019 after the nine Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in the borough made the decision to work together to deliver a uniform approach for local residents. The process was led by a task group of primary care leads including Stockwell GP, Dr. Vikesh Sharma, who has long taken a more holistic approach to health and wellbeing through working with others in the community. [Age UK Lambeth](#) who were well-established locally were engaged to support the set-up of services. Dr. Sharma has been able to utilise his clinical role and strong community connections to ensure social prescribing has been well integrated not only into his practice but also with what was already happening on a community level.

THE APPROACH

To date, the service has been primarily delivered during the time of the pandemic and this has had a significant impact on how it has developed in Stockwell and at a borough level. Key features of the approach have been:

Utilising existing relationships

At the set-up stage, Age UK were funded to recruit, train and mentor newly appointed link workers across the borough. Having already been delivering a 'one-stop' referral system and with good pre-existing relationships with health partners, they were well-equipped to support the development of a standardised and effective approach. More locally in Stockwell, Dr. Sharma has made use of his relationships across the community to ensure link workers are well-connected at a grassroots level.

“
Social prescribing has been a great catalyst
for joining up much of the great work going
on locally and breaking down barriers
between primary care and the community

- Vikesh Sharma, GP

TOP TIPS

- **Build from the ground level up**, taking into account what's already there in terms of community activity and skills and voluntary sector organisations.
- **Be collaborative and inclusive**, recognising the different skills and perspectives brought by different actors.
- **Be flexible and ready to adapt to change**, and open to the learning it can bring.

Being responsive and adaptable

At the beginning of the first lockdown, the scheme adapted by utilising shielding lists to contact vulnerable patients to ensure support was in place, with practice teams also working with link workers to identify further priority patients. Age UK were part of a partnership involving the voluntary sector and local authority which became known as [Connect Lambeth](#) which coordinated an integrated range of support for vulnerable residents e.g. shopping, medication, befriending. Following on from the initial phase of response, link workers moved to a more traditional social prescribing model whereby more complex cases were followed up and given more ongoing support and connection to a wider range of services.

An asset-based approach

Alongside the development of social prescribing, Dr. Sharma was also involved with establishing the [Thriving Stockwell forum](#) alongside community partners with whom he had existing relationships. This forum has sought to take an asset-based, grassroots community development approach and look at how to maintain community collaboration beyond the initial phase of the pandemic. The vision is for the link worker to provide the connection between clinical services and community activities, with hopes of building sustainable capacity amongst mutual aid groups and other hyperlocal community organisations with a connected infrastructure of health and wellbeing across the neighbourhood. For example, opportunities were identified where expertise could be shared amongst volunteers or where training (mental health first aid) and practical support (single point of access phone lines) could be provided by larger organisations.

CASE STUDY CONTACT

Name: Vikesh Sharma
Organisation: Grantham Practice, Stockwell
Website: <https://www.thegp.london/>

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This case study has been produced by the [Bromley by Bow Centre](#) and [Healthy London Partnership](#) who are working together to support the development of social prescribing in London. For more information or to put forward your scheme as a potential case study, please contact hlp.socialprescribing@nhs.net

THE BENEFITS

Although the pivot to a strong focus on pandemic response meant the early phase of delivery wasn't a 'pure form' of social prescribing, the speed and intensity of the task at hand meant that **link workers quickly became part of the team**, working with clinicians and others to establish the best ways of ensuring that those at the sharp end of health inequalities got the help they needed. This **accelerated how quickly link workers became embedded within teams** despite the challenges of remote working.

The early phase of the pandemic also provided **useful learning, particularly in relation to triaging which patients require more intensive support** and how to avoid co-dependency which has had a long-term benefit.

Overall, the service has led to a **strengthening of relationships between primary care, community groups and the local voluntary sector**, with the sense of a strong coalition of actors working together to tackle challenges.

THE CHALLENGES

Along with common social prescribing challenges such as closing feedback loops between link workers and clinicians and measuring impact, key challenges have been around the need to capacity build community assets as care navigation through link workers increasingly diverts patients towards them.

Lambeth Portuguese Wellbeing Partnership

Alongside supporting the development of social prescribing, Dr. Sharma has also been involved in setting up the [Lambeth Portuguese Wellbeing Partnership](#) (LPWP), a network of 40 local community groups and organisations established in recognition of the health inequalities faced by Portuguese speakers locally. The network is now well-established with its own funding as a CIC. At the start of the pandemic, LPWP volunteers quickly self-organised to create Portuguese-speaking mutual aid groups. This has gone on to evolve into the LPWP 7 day a week acute response helpline for the community. The partnership had also been working on a Household Model Project which looked at health and wellbeing through the lens of relationships and social connection. This project came into its own during lockdown with a greater intensity to household level relationships.

THE OUTCOME

Through this approach, it is hoped that social prescribing will not only be well-integrated into clinical settings and pathways in Stockwell, but that it will be an effective meeting point for clinical services and community activity, facilitating a neighbourhood approach to a health and wellbeing ecosystem which ultimately leads to greater citizen empowerment and addresses health inequalities.

RESOURCES

Connect Lambeth

For more information on the work of Connect Lambeth, visit their website [here](#).

LPWP

For more information on the work of the Lambeth Portuguese Wellbeing Partnership, click [here](#).

Interview with Dr. Vikesh Sharma

To read the Global GP Project interview with Dr Vikesh Sharma, click [here](#).

London Case Studies Database

For more case studies and great examples of best practice, click [here](#).

London Social Prescribing Film Series

Watch inspiring films with Social Prescribing colleagues from across London sharing their experiences, ways of working and how they support their communities, click [here](#).

Regional Facilitators – London

Support is available to help you connect with social prescribing networks across London and your local area, for more information please contact: suzi.griffiths@nhs.net and dan.hopewell@bbbc.org.uk



For information and resources to support social prescribing schemes across London, please visit: [Healthy London Partnership](#) and [Bromley by Bow Centre](#).



For information on how to join the London Plus social prescribing network [click here](#).

CASE STUDY CONTACT

Name: Vikesh Sharma
Organisation: Grantham Practice, Stockwell
Website: <https://www.thegp.london/>

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This case study has been produced by the [Bromley by Bow Centre](#) and [Healthy London Partnership](#) who are working together to support the development of social prescribing in London. For more information or to put forward your scheme as a potential case study, please contact hlp.socialprescribing@nhs.net