

# Social prescribing: Leg Clubs - a collaborative example



The NHS is facing what appears to be ever-increasing fiscal holes between what we currently have, and what we have to do in the future. The political mantra is for us to get better at empowering people to look after themselves, using low-cost, high-impact interventions. If this is not accomplished, as a health-care profession we are going to really struggle in the near future to fund a comprehensive health service that is able to address the public's expectations.

One method of addressing social isolation is social prescribing. This approach emphasises the importance of wellbeing, health promotion and education. While some doctors may refer patients directly to groups or activities, the huge number of options on offer from the community and voluntary sectors means it is often more efficient to refer to services, such as the psychosocial Leg Club model.

This approach can be seen to fulfil a preventative role, addressing the needs of the vulnerable and socially isolated individual experiencing life with a problem of the lower limb. Modern-day patient care demands many disciplines and skills in addition to those supplied by the medical and nursing profession, and prime consideration should be given to patients' wants and feelings when planning care. This requires increasing attention to be paid to the human dimension of debility.

Social prescribing within local communities, using a multi-agency approach to health care, encourages individuals to become proactive in decisions about their own health, as well as increasing social contact and support within their local communities.

Leg Clubs do this by creatively using current resources and embracing the third sector support that is available to make a successful, alternative and truly holistic means of treatment. As older people are at increased risk of developing arterial and venous incompetence, improved life expectancy means the number of people with ulcers is likely to rise. The Leg Club model provides semi-autonomous health care, which leads to significant practitioner and patient empowerment, as well as relieving pressure on other health-care providers and services offering more traditional methods of treatment.

Leg Clubs provide a creative response to this increased need by delivering a psycho-social model of care, where treatment takes place in a non-medical setting, collectively, on a drop-in

basis. Working in partnership with clinicians and volunteers, Leg Clubs react to the struggle with the social isolation this long-term condition can cause. Many Clubs have embraced the social prescribing by introducing activities from walking and photographic activities, chair aerobics to knitting groups and social Leg Club outings, to name a few.

A provider service and clinical team see the value and use local community-based facilities to establish the Leg Club, such as a community centre, village or church hall. Local businesses are recruited to work with the committee, such as transport companies, designers and printers.

The depth of variation in the type of localities Leg Clubs serve shows how truly flexible the model of care underpinning them is. The continued expansion and evolution of Leg Clubs to accommodate changes in UK health care is a huge achievement, especially in an austere health economy.

## An award-winning social prescribing Leg Club

Polly Cox, Team Coordinator for the Rurals Integrated Care Team at North Somerset Community Partnership (NSCP) has received an Employee's Excellence award for her work establishing the Nailsea District Leg Club (*Figure 1*). The award, which was given by NSCP Chief Executive, Penny Brown, acknowledges Polly's effort in creating a successful Leg Club, which has seen improved healing rates for patients suffering with leg ulcers.

As a result of the holistic nature of Leg Clubs, and the social dimension they provide, Club members have an improved quality of life. The previously housebound have been mobilised and many new friendships have developed, all of which help self-esteem and consequently concordance with treatment.

Data records taken between the Club's launch in July 2015 up to July 2016 demonstrate how effective this method of treatment has been. All Leg Club members, whose ulcers had healed during the Club's first year, have not experienced recurrence of the condition.

Nailsea Leg Club Chair, Carole Brooke said:

*'We are very proud of our Leg Club as it has certainly proved to be addressing a need in our community, the healing rates are excellent and everyone who attends really appreciates the care and attention they receive.'*

The Nailsea Leg Club, which was the first to open in Somerset, was set up by Nailsea Family Practice in conjunction with the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation and the North Somerset Community Partnership.

## Ellie Lindsay, OBE

President, The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation

ellie.lindsay@legclub.org



**Figure 1.** Polly Cox receives her award

### Community fundraising

Nine volunteers of the Nailsea District Leg Club have just completed a 10 km charity walk—much of it uphill!—organised by the local Rotary Club. To date, the team have raised around £1250. It was a great day for the keen walkers, and the volunteers proudly wore their Leg Club tabards, which was a great way of starting up conversations with others they met along the way.

In addition, a celebration took place on the Leg Club's first birthday. A cheque was presented by the Inner Wheel for £350, which they have raised on behalf of the Leg Club team. A birthday cake was made for all members, volunteers and nurses to share—in the shape of a leg!

### Lindsay Leg Club Foundation forms partnership with the Wound Guy

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation is to form a partnership with The Wound Guy, with the ultimate aim of providing a better quality of life for patients experiencing life with a leg ulcer.

The Wound Guy is Australia-based Gary Bain. Gary provides wound management education and clinical support to medical, nursing and allied health professionals, as well as patients and their lobby groups. He has over 30 years' experience as a clinician and educator in the management of complex and chronic wounds.

As a Foundation we can accomplish a great deal by working closely with The Wound Guy. With nine Leg Clubs in Australia, and more set to open, our joint aim to offer health professionals working in community care opportunities to innovatively manage the increasing burden of leg ulcers will be greatly enhanced.

The aim of this collaborative partnership is to draw clinicians, patients and the Leg Club Industry Partners (LCIP) together through education, clinical involvement and dialogue. Key concepts of this collaborative partnership are ownership, empowerment and improvement, to which all parties are encouraged to aspire.

### World Union of Wound Healing Societies (WUWHS) Foundation Symposium: Sister Societies Session

The session, *Patient centred care – a call to action for wound management*, will take place on Sunday 25th September 2016, between 3pm and 5pm in Hall Garavaggi Fortessa da Basso Conference Centre.

The Board of Trustees is delighted that our Foundation Patron Professor Marco Romanelli, President elect of the World Union of Wound Healing Societies, will be officially opening the foundation symposium with a welcome address.

The purpose of the foundation symposium is to showcase research and practise innovations being undertaken in four countries to address issues that confront individuals experiencing life with a wound. The session will also consider obstacles to patient advocacy encountered in our professional field and country.

Our symposium—articulated by an expert interprofessional panel committed to creating policies and guidelines at an international level that focus on patient-centred care—will begin by examining how we sometimes create obstacles for our patients that leave them badly informed, disempowered and disenfranchised, concluding with a panel discussion and how as professionals we need to unite and work in partnership with various disciplines and research organisations. We look forward to seeing you there. **CWC**

# Save the date

The Lindsay Leg Club will be holding their annual conference **Feeling Better, Getting Better: Holistic Wound Management at Worcester Rugby club on Wednesday 21–Thursday 22 September 2016.**

