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Health Trainers and GP Practices: Working together for better patient outcomes

Having a health trainer within a GP practice or working closely with the practice team is becoming more common. This new way of working benefits patients, GP Practices and the Health Trainer Service itself.

This briefing gives examples of health trainers and GPs working together, outlines the key benefits and sets out how to establish a good working relationship.



WHO DO HEALTH TRAINERS HELP?

Health trainers support people in making changes to improve their health and wellbeing. They help people who:

- have long term conditions such as diabetes
- suffer from chronic pain
- have mild to moderate mental health problems
- want to eat better, exercise more or lose weight
- want to drink less or give up smoking

DID YOU KNOW?

Health trainers undertake accredited training in motivational interviewing, communication skills, support for behaviour change, community engagement and lifestyle issues.



“GPs are really good at doing the medical stuff.... We have less time in our ten minutes to deal with the much wider psycho-social issues and it’s been fantastic having the back-up of the health trainers and their coaching approach to the wider issues.”

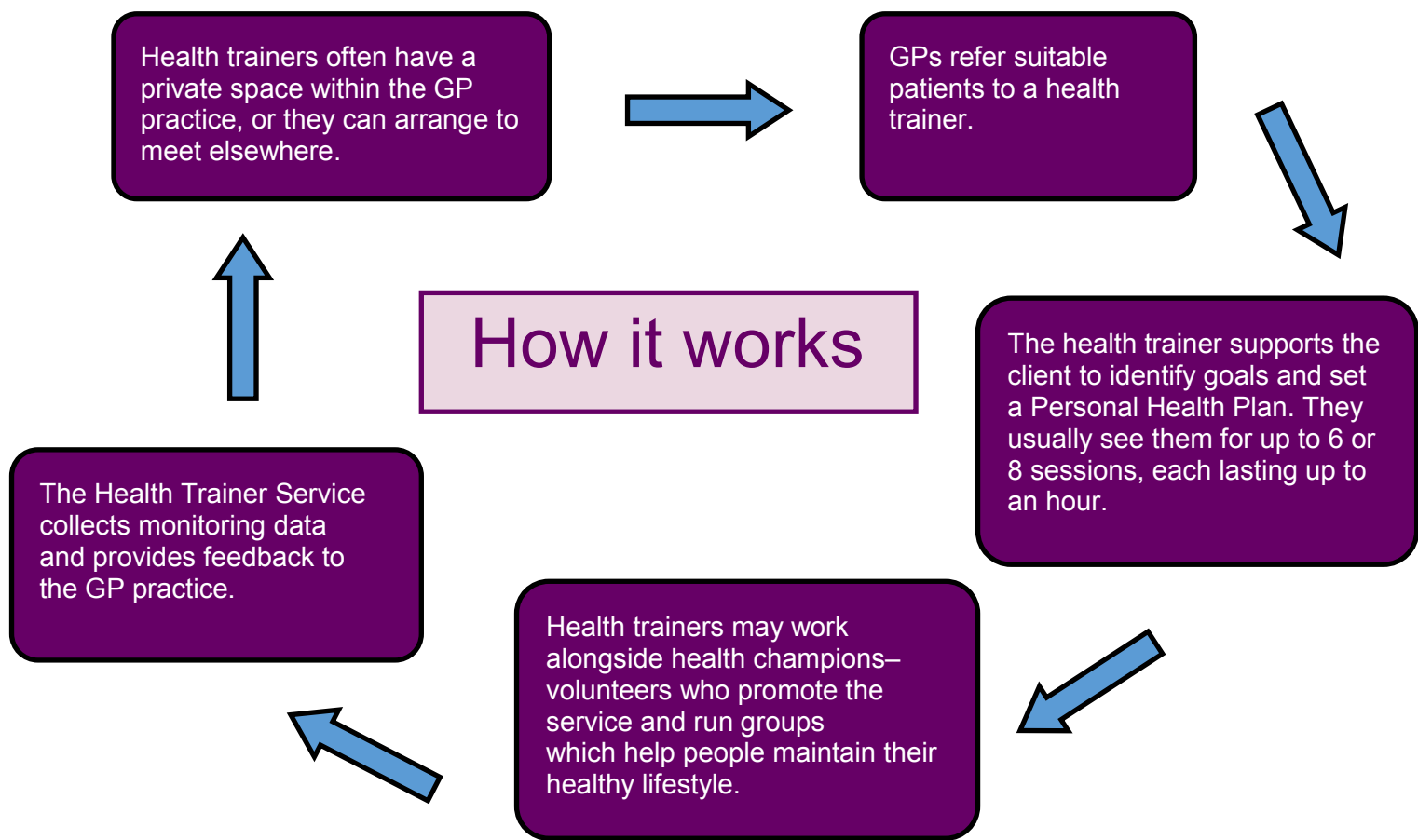
Ollie Hart, GP based in Sheffield
(pictured above)

“What I found was not only an understanding and non-judgmental trainer, who advised and led me down the path of correct eating and portion control. But also regaining the will power through her belief in me which led me to believe in myself. I would like to thank (my health trainer) personally and the health trainers in general for giving me my life back.”

(James, referred to a health trainer by his GP)

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DID YOU KNOW?

Health trainers were originally conceived as 'support from next door'. In 2014, 43% of clients and 32% of health trainers come from areas of high deprivation (the poorest 20% of people in England).¹

DID YOU KNOW?

Leeds health trainers can speak 10 community languages. In Haringey they can speak Turkish and Somali, which are the most commonly used community languages.

THE REFERRAL PROCESS

A personal recommendation from a GP means patients see support from a health trainer as an integral part of their care. A simple referral process is needed. Options include:

- GPs directly booking patients an appointment with a health trainer.
- GPs 'tasking a referral' – the health trainer then contacts the patient to arrange an appointment
- GPs signposting patients to the health trainer to make their own appointment.



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THE GP PERSPECTIVE

BENEFITS FOR GPs

Having a health trainer 'in-house' means GPs can focus on the medical aspects of care whilst health trainers support clients to make healthier lifestyle choices, connect them to activities that can help them maintain change and support them with social issues like isolation. Health trainers in GP practices:

- Have **time** to see patients, for up to an hour per session
- Come from similar backgrounds so they can **empathise**
- Often speak community **languages**
- Know what groups exist locally so can **signpost** clients to the right local services
- Help tackle **social isolation**

TIPS FOR GP PRACTICES AND COMMISSIONERS

- Provide a suitable, private **consultation room**
- Devise an **easy referral** system
- Agree with the Health Trainer Service what sorts of issues can be referred
- **Involve** health trainers in practice meetings so they understand your priorities
- Work with the health trainers to identify community health needs and **develop community capacity**
- Collaborate with the CCG to **secure funding** for health trainers



“Our health trainer specialises in providing intense support, motivation and advice for people to make healthy lifestyle changes. This has been especially important this year with our drive to reduce unplanned admissions and encourage our patients and community to be more independent. The Health Trainer Service know all about what services would suit the patient after a holistic assessment and getting buy-in from the client of the most appropriate support and intervention to support individuals in achieving their goals. I am not sure where we would be without our health trainer and her colleagues. They are now an integral part of providing holistic care in a proactive manner to our community.”

(GP based in Kirklees)

DID YOU KNOW?

A full-time health trainer supports, on average, 152 clients per year. ²

DID YOU KNOW?

76% of health trainer clients fully or partly achieve their Personal Health Plan. ³

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THE HEALTH TRAINER SERVICE PERSPECTIVE

BENEFITS FOR HEALTH TRAINER SERVICES

By being in a GP practice, health trainers are able to see a large number of appropriate clients.

People with long-term conditions who are referred by their GP are more likely to see it as part of their overall package of care.

Most Health Trainer Services still operate in the community too, meaning they can still reach those who don't regularly visit a GP.

TIPS FOR HEALTH TRAINER MANAGERS

- Building up a relationship with a GP Practice takes **time**
- Learn **who and how** to approach within a practice e.g. Patient Participation Groups, Team Meetings, Nurses' Forums etc.
- **Build trust** by addressing any concerns practices may have regarding, for example, training or governance
- Have a **flexible approach** - what GP practices want and need will vary
- Communicate the **personal and professional skills** that health trainers have
- Demonstrate the **effectiveness of the service** by giving regular feedback on clients' progress
- Keep **contacts consistent**
- Ask for **feedback** as the service develops



HEALTH TRAINER MANAGERS SAY...

"We work in 90% of our GP Practices now but it took a lot of time and effort to actually get in there but I can confidently say eight years on, we're very much part of the work that goes on in there and most of our referrals are from GPs. We visited GP Practices several times to talk to them, to hear their concerns, to explain the training people got – that was really helpful in terms of providing GPs with assurances around governance and credibility... That began to grow so other GPs became aware of what neighbouring practices were doing – and then their patients began asking for it too."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Health Trainers website

www.healthtrainersengland.com

contains links to information on job roles, available evidence including academic papers, the two previous evidence briefings and much more.

- Evidence Briefing No 1 – Behaviour Change for Health
- Evidence Briefing No 2 - Engaging with Communities

The Royal Society for Public Health www.rsph.org.uk publishes reports on the effectiveness of Health Trainer Services and their role in public health.

Recent reports include:

- Minded to change: the link between mental wellbeing and healthier lifestyles, November 2015
- Indicators of change: The adaption of the Health Trainer service in England, February 2014

