

The BIG Bolton Health Check

The ambition

To develop an industrially scaled, and systematically applied, cardiovascular disease (CVD) and diabetes prevention initiative.

Background

Bolton is situated in the North West of England. The town's urbanisation was largely driven by textile manufacturing during the industrial revolution. Employment in heavy industry declined sharply in the 20th century and has largely been replaced by hi-tech electronics, data processing and IT services.

Bolton has an ethnically diverse population. 79% of the population are classed as White British, whilst the largest ethnic minority group is South Asian – 14%. Population numbers are projected to increase by 7.5% from 277,300 in 2011 to 298,200 in 2021. 2013 data suggests that life expectancy in Bolton is approximately 2 years lower than the English average. Male life expectancy is 75.7 years compared to 78.3 nationally, and female life expectancy is 80.1 years compared to 82.3 years nationally.

How Bolton developed its BIG Bolton Health Check Programme 2008-2009

In 2007, Bolton was in an unenviable position with regards to health inequalities and premature mortality. People in the town were dying before their time, from often preventable conditions such as coronary heart disease and stroke. The evidence suggested that people living in the most deprived areas of the town were living 15 years less than people living in the more affluent parts. In an attempt to address these issues, NHS Bolton developed *The BIG Bolton Health Check*, and this was implemented between April 2008 and March 2009.



One of the aims of the programme was to get everyone involved, especially those able to influence people to have a health check. As a result every GP practice in Bolton signed up, with all staff in the surgery getting involved, including receptionists. Additional engagement included Bolton Council, faith groups, the voluntary sector and The Bolton News. In particular, The Bolton News played a major role, publishing stories on a weekly basis throughout the year.

The BIG Bolton Health Check resulted in the development of robust primary prevention registers. At the end of the project more than 20,000 people were identified as being at high risk of developing CVD or diabetes.

By April 2009 73,000 health checks had been recorded:

- 67,000 in primary care
- 6,000 in community settings i.e. supermarkets, bingo halls, cafes and barbers.

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Whilst the outreach work did not generate as many health checks as primary care, the subsequent evaluation highlights these settings as a key element of the marketing strategy for this initiative. Following the initiative, the health check agenda was firmly embedded in Bolton. The project has since been lauded as a great success. There has been much interest in the project and its outcomes from both within the UK and internationally. Many learning points have been acknowledged from the implementation of such a big programme. In particular, the marked difference in the numbers of health checks conducted in the two distinct settings – primary care and outreach – led to the decision to deliver the NHS Health Check solely within the primary care setting going forward.

Health trainers

One of the key innovations of the BIG Bolton Health Check was to align the Health Trainer Service with the project.

Bolton's Health Trainers were allocated to GP surgeries to support the health check process. They were trained to undertake venepuncture and record blood pressure as part of their everyday role. This skill set, a local customisation, is not part of the national model for Health Trainers.

As a result of the BIG Bolton Health Check, the Health Trainer role gained great credibility and they are now fully integrated within local primary care teams. Their prevention role is firmly embedded in GP surgeries, complementing the treatment role offered by GPs and Practice Nurses.

The primary prevention registers, developed during the BIG Bolton Health Check, identified a large number of patients who were sufficiently motivated to change their unhealthy behaviours. The Health Trainers have been working with this group ever since to support them to modify their lifestyle, and improve their health and wellbeing.

How did Bolton adopt the NHS Health Check Programme?

The crossover between the Big Bolton Health Check and the new NHS Health Check was considerable. In recent times, Bolton Council and Bolton CCG have been working together to constantly improve the uptake of health checks in the town. Every GP practice is still very much engaged with the NHS Health Check Programme. The philosophy adopted by primary care is that this is everyone's job, and all surgery staff work hard to encourage patients to make an appointment for an NHS Health Check. Bolton's Health Trainers are still supporting practices with this agenda, although it is only a small part of their overall behaviour change role. This model is very successful. It works on the basis that an individual is able to engage with the Health Trainer from the beginning to the end of the NHS Health Check pathway.

Health Trainers will typically see a patient for a 30 minute NHS Health Check. During this time they can explain what is happening and why. They can then provide details of what might happen next. They are able to introduce the idea of the comprehensive lifestyle assessment, should the patient be found to be at high risk. Subsequent evaluation has shown that this model is not only effective as a process, but can support improved health outcomes for patients in this group.

The critical success factors

- **Primary care** - all GP surgeries are engaged with the NHS Health Check
- **Health Trainers** - being based in primary care embeds prevention alongside treatment
- **Health Trainers** - support every part of the patient's health check journey
- **Leadership** – provided by Dr Stephen Liversedge (Director of Primary Care and Health Improvement). Dr Liversedge is the clinical lead for health checks, providing knowledge and motivation to maintain and develop this programme.

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Key challenges

- Selling the idea to the public of a multidisciplinary team within GP surgeries, focussing on prevention as well as treatment

Outcomes from the BIG Bolton Health Check

- 82% of the eligible population received an NHS Health Check
- Development of robust 'at risk' registers
- GPs have a better understanding of the role of Health Trainers
- GP referrals to Health Trainers increase year on year
- Added value outcomes – identification, within one year, of an extra:
 - 2049 people with hypertension
 - 1029 people with diabetes
 - 2100 chronic kidney disease (CKD) patients

These individuals were added to the appropriate disease registers, allowing primary care to deliver appropriate treatment and ongoing management.

An additional finding

In 2010 and 2013 two separate, small scale studies were conducted with 134 patients on the 'at risk of diabetes' registers. All these patients had been initially identified by the NHS Health Check Programme. The patients were subsequently provided with a six month lifestyle intervention service delivered by a Health Trainer.

The results of both studies have been encouraging. On average, 43% of patients, identified at high risk of developing diabetes returned to normal glycaemic levels after the intervention. Overall, 82% made some improvement to their glycaemic levels.

Moving forwards

The particular demands facing Bolton's Primary Care services has meant that long term Health Trainers are likely to be better utilised on lifestyle modification interventions. As such steps were put in place in primary care from the beginning to establish an NHS Health Check system which wouldn't rely on the Health Trainer workforce moving forwards.

Contact

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To find out more about the 'Living Longer Lives' Programme:

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