

NHS HEALTH CHECKS

MARCH 2014

CASE STUDY

Southwark Lay Health Workers - NHS Health Checks

Holistic approaches to engaging deprived communities

The ambition

To develop a method to encourage seldom seen and seldom heard groups to attend the NHS Health Check, while at the same time increasing the capacity of the NHS Health Check service and increasing the supply of qualified health workers within the local community.

The background

Southwark is a densely populated inner London borough. The population increased by 37,700 in the last 10 years and in 2010 the population was estimated at 294,400. The borough has areas of high deprivation and while this has improved in recent years it remains the 12th most deprived in London and the 41st nationally.

Southwark has a life expectancy gap of up to 10.6 separating the most and least economically advantaged groups. Average life expectancy in Southwark is 82.9 years for women and 77.8 years for men. While the numbers of deaths per year are broadly in line with the rest of England, one third are 'early deaths' (under 75 years). Circulatory disease accounts for almost a quarter of these (23%) and the family of cardiovascular disease impacts significantly on morbidity within the borough.

Southwark set out to encourage the eligible population to take up their NHS Health Check. One of the challenges in achieving this was the fact that not all patients accessed healthcare through traditional routes, if at all, and for some language and cultural barriers could be an issue.



The solution

Southwark, and London as a whole, has a large population of health workers who have trained in other countries and have not yet completed conversion training to practice in the UK. These workers often come from within at risk communities.

Southwark developed a programme to train these individuals to carry out NHS Health Checks. Tapping into this rich source of knowledge and experience allowed Southwark to deliver more checks, in a wider variety of locations by people who understood the cultural needs of specific communities.

The programme provided health workers with training and experience to support their conversion status. For workers unable to gain qualified status at the same level in the UK as they had in their home countries, the programme provided a good understanding of alternative careers within the NHS or employment within local GP practices or community trusts.

Implementing the programme

To identify candidates, Southwark contacted both local colleges offering conversion training and local charities supporting refugees who were likely to be aware of health workers. Identified individuals were then invited to apply for the programme. Southwark laid out its expectations clearly in the programme's terms and conditions and while Southwark was unable to pay the workers, they offered NHS Health Check training and out of pocket expenses.

The training consisted of three short days and covered health promotion and outreach skills, clinical screening skills, long term conditions, smoking cessation, nutrition, exercise and sexual and mental health. It also included communication skills, understanding the NHS and the profile of Southwark, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, infection control and confidentiality and consent training.

Training was delivered in house or by volunteers who were willing to give their time to support the scheme. Once trained, lay health workers were able to carry out NHS Health Checks under the supervision of qualified nurses or equivalent supervisor. Further, Southwark attempted to place trained lay workers in settings relevant to their speciality, for example pharmacists in pharmacies.

In addition to the above Southwark offered extra training on topics such as public health and cancer to enable workers to update their knowledge and areas of professional interest. The majority of the project was delivered in house using existing staff. The scheme costs around £3000 a year to run, most of this being to fund the out of pocket expenses of the lay health workers.



The outcome

So far, Southwark have trained five cohorts of lay health workers, with approximately 10 to 12 people in each cohort. At least two thirds of those who took part in the scheme have gone on to gain places on full time training courses or gained permanent jobs.

As a result of the scheme, Southwark are now able to offer over 1,600 NHS Health Checks over the year in a wider range of settings and in ways which are more specific to the cultural needs of the targeted communities.

Contact

Teresa Edmans, Programme Manager - NHS Health Checks

Email: teresa.edmans@southwark.gov.uk

Tel: 0207 525 0270