

Books on Prescription Audit Report

Following on from the launch of the Cardiff 'Books on Prescription' Scheme, this report charts the development of a local scheme in Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire. It is hoped that this report of the pilot project will provide a practical sense of how the scheme evolved from the initial interest through to the findings of the initial audit.

The south Telford Health Promotion Specialist and the CHEC manager held a budget which included an element for neighbourhood working within south Telford and was made available to applications from within the Neighbourhood Action Team Health sub group for health related projects. The idea of a local Books on Prescription scheme to run in south Telford was suggested by a Clinical Psychologist. A project proposal was complete, submitted and approved.

A small working party evolved including, two Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) psychologists, the Health Promotion Specialist, who held the budget for the project and the Principal Librarian for Central & South Telford & Wrekin. An Assistant Psychologist and another Clinical Psychologist employed by a GP practice later joined the steering group.

'The Books on Prescription' Scheme arises from the context of bibliotherapy as a way of expanding access to psychological help. The scheme comprises a list of recognised self-help literature that GPs and potentially other primary care workers could recommend to people who present in primary care services describing problems of mild-moderate mental distress. This scheme could be employed either as an alternative to or an adjunct to any pharmacological input. (see Frude 2004)

The steering group member's diversity fostered conversations on our different perspectives and varying ideas were brought to the table for discussion. A range of topics was discussed over months including; Are these books helpful/accessible? Would GPs take up the idea of a book as another source of help for people? Did we want to go with the language of 'prescribing' books? What did we want any promotional literature to convey to people? Further issues discussed were literacy levels; ways of

presenting and promoting materials; helpful ways of introducing new ideas to local services; possible alternatives to the idea of a 'prescription'. As was mentioned these discussions took place over a number of months in relation to how the promotional literature could be designed, what people wanted it to look like and even what quote would the group select to reflect the ideas behind the scheme. Group members being local and in different services was invaluable for knowing who could be helpful with, for example, printing and presentation of the scheme's literature. The Steering Group decided to employ a professional printing firm to work with us on design and printing as we were mindful of the significance of producing both informative and high-quality promotional materials for the scheme. A local printing firm was very helpful and attended a few of the working party meetings to talk about design and to ensure they understood what the scheme was about.

By February 2005 the participating libraries and GP surgeries had been identified and the working party members were preparing to meet with the practice staff and present the scheme and the idea of the pilot project to them. Overall the responses were favourable and we were given a timely reminder from the GP practice staff about some of the issues that had led to our wanting to run a pilot project initially such as the length of some of the books and language used within them.

The potential for the scheme to facilitate connections between different local services, i.e. GPs, libraries, mental health workers and service users was the context to our wish to gain feedback from these different stakeholder groups. It was hoped that this would enable an understanding of whether the pragmatics of the scheme were a 'good enough fit' with the ways that the services involved already worked.

The pilot finally began in October 2005 and the report of the audit of this pilot project is presented below.

The audit looks at data from October 2005 to May 2006. Three GP surgeries from the Telford and Wrekin area took part. These were Woodside Medical Practice, Sutton Hill Medical Practice and Stirchley Medical Practice. Woodside Medical Practice has 4 GPs

and is located in the south of Telford. Sutton Hill Medical Practice has 5 GPs and is also located in the south of Telford. Stirchley Medical Practice has 7 GPs and is located to the south of the town centre between the town centre and Woodside/ Sutton Hill.

The collections of books were held at Madeley Library (South Telford) and Stirchley Library, which is adjacent to the Stirchley Medical Practice, but patients were able to access the service from any of the nine libraries in the authority.

This report will track the prescriptions issued by GPs, looking at whether these resulted in a book being taken out and examining which books were prescribed. Feedback from GPs involved in the scheme will also be included as well as feedback from patients who took books out.

Throughout the duration of the audit period of the scheme 42 prescriptions were issued from the GPs taking part. 25 of these came from Woodside Medical Practice, 2 from Sutton Hill Medical Practice and 15 from Stirchley Medical Practice.

Of the 42 prescriptions issued, 13 resulted in a book being taken out of the library. Stirchley library issued 7 books while Madeley library issued 6 books.

Feedback from scheme users

A bookmark was given out with each book that was issued asking participants to give feedback on the usefulness of the scheme and the book. Participants were asked to hand these in when they returned the book. 9 bookmarks were returned in total. 4 of these were returned following a prescription from a GP. 5 bookmarks were returned from people who had taken advantage of the scheme as a result of advertising in the library and who therefore had taken the book out there and then without visiting their GP.

The tables below show the questions asked on the bookmark and the responses received.

- How useful did you find the book?

1(Not useful)	
2	
3	3
4	2
5 (very Useful)	
No reply	4

- Would you use self help books in future?

Yes	4
No	1
No reply	4

- Would you recommend the 'books on prescription' scheme to others?

Yes	5
No	
No reply	4

No other comments were received from the book mark evaluations. The feedback received shows that in the main patients found the scheme positive. This was true even when the book may not have been that helpful. However, it seems that despite this, patients still found the idea of a self help book useful and appreciated an alternative to traditional prescriptions.

Feedback from GPs

GPs from the 3 surgeries taking part were asked to fill in a questionnaire about the scheme. 5 GPs responded out of 16. Their responses are given below.

1. Have you used the scheme? Yes 3 No 2

2. If YES, how many prescriptions did you give out?

'One or two'

'Only approx 4'

3. If NOT, was this because; (*please tick all that apply*)

Too little time in consultation

Scheme not clear: 1

Difficulties with the suggested books: 1

Use of prescription form: 1

Literacy levels required for reading books: 1

Other: 1

Used alternative service

4. How useful did you find the scheme on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is 'not useful' and 5 being 'very useful'?

1: 3

2

3

4: 2

5

5. How useful do you think patients found the scheme on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is 'not useful' and 5 being 'very useful'?

1: 1

2

3

4: 1

5

'Not sure- no feedback'

'Have not had any patient feedback positive or negative'

6. How many follow up consultations did you undertake?

'None'

'None as a direct consequence of using the scheme'

'Not appropriate as did not use the scheme. Did not feel confident enough or knowledgeable about range of books to even think of them as an option in the consultation.'

7. Would you like the scheme to continue as it is now?

Yes: 2

No: 2

8. Would you like the scheme to expand?

Yes: 1

No: 2

Please add any other comments below:

'I wish I had used it more but I often forget.'

'A laminated sheet with a précis of which books and some information about the book would be the most useful thing for me.'

'Would certainly like to be able to continue to offer patients the chance to read these books.'

'I think it's a good idea. The books chosen were too high-brow for our patients. I think there are several books our counsellors regularly recommend that might be more useful and also leaflets etc. I think the scheme needs to be discussed with the counsellors and their recommendations taken up. I would very much like to see this scheme developed and the books easily available in libraries.'

The feedback from the GPs shows mixed opinions as to the efficacy of this scheme.

However, some commented on the usefulness of the scheme without having prescribed

any books. It may be that the practical aspects e.g. the layout of the prescription form put people off trying the scheme. Certainly feedback suggested that the scheme had been helpful to some patients. In addition to the above feedback form we received feedback from a meeting with Sutton Hill Medical Practice. The feedback can be seen below:

- **Feedback on the prescription pad** – Pad itself is messy document. Not really used for any other scheme. A separate pad would be better. Did not feel that electronic system would be any more useful.
- **Feedback on the scheme's promotional literature** – Smaller pamphlets to give away to patients would be easier practically. Pamphlet as an 'aide memoir'. To have information in front of you would promote use of scheme for GPs as remembering about the scheme was hard at times. Use of standardised leaflets that could be printed out and given out; was also more likely to be read by the GPs.
- **Feedback on the books themselves and the list** – Difficult to select titles as had not read books themselves. Brief critical review and summary of each book would be helpful and may support GPs to select a particular book. Concerned about literacy level of population; reading also a less common activity in their population. Suggestion of shortening list and having a couple of copies present in the surgery to encourage use of scheme. However this raises the question of whether the GPs had read the promotional leaflet in which each title had been précised.
- **Feedback on scheme location** – Possibility of having books visible in the surgery; idea of a patient library. Books located 'in house' versus being in a local library. Issue of where the scheme 'sits' in relation to other available options e.g. counsellor.
- **Feedback on GP practice** – Need training as GPs as can be slow to change own practice. Issue of consulting style at present and how to insert this scheme into their thinking about what they are already doing. Took around a year for GPs to really make use of exercise scheme, which linked to idea of having a scheme

champion that can keep pushing the GPs. This was mentioned several times in relation to encouraging them to use other schemes. Helpful to have info on how scheme is going elsewhere, where it has succeeded, to further engage GPs.

- **Overall feedback** – helpful alternative to prescribing. Patients positive about the scheme. Recognition that it takes time i.e. years for a scheme to become embedded in practice and to become used regularly, by both GPs and patients so remain interested. Too early to say that the scheme should not continue. Simpler paperwork would be welcome. Feedback from individual patients about the scheme and books would also be valued. Noted on number of occasions the context of patients and how this could influence the way the scheme is used.

Feedback was also received from members of Woodside Medical Practice. Their comments can be seen below:

- Would be more supportive of guided self help
- Abuse books – not appropriate to just hand them out.
- Audio versions of some would help clients with literacy problems. Some of the books were too big.
- Books on anger and anxiety were the most useful
- GPs reported finding the forms unhelpful. One would have liked an electronic form.
- GPs reported not having enough time in consultations to talk about the books with a patient.
- One patient feedback that he felt that the scheme had 'changed my life' after reading a book on anger.

Summary and Conclusion

It is clear that those who took part in the scheme and returned their bookmark found the scheme to be useful and would recommend it to others. Although some GPs had concerns about practical aspects concerning the way the scheme functioned, it seems that many thought that with some adjustments it could be a possible alternative to traditional treatments. It is only to be expected that a pilot scheme of this nature would encounter some problems and that there would need to be some change as a result. It

seems that the main area of change suggested appears to be in why particular books are included in the scheme, how much is known about them and how appropriate these are given that some of the population may have literacy problems. GPs suggested that more information about the books be available to them in order to help them in making choices about which book may be appropriate for a person. One possibility of resolving concerns about why particular books are included could be to have a leaflet giving a description of each book and a brief justification about how the list of books has been created. One suggestion was also to have copies of a couple of the books in the surgery to encourage use of the scheme but also so that GPs could become more familiar with the books.

Other barriers to using the scheme appeared to be the prescription form. Some felt that a clearer prescription pad just for this scheme might be useful, as the general pad used at present tends to be quite a messy document. Another alternative suggested was to have an electronic prescription form.

The prescriptions showed that there was a difference in whether books were taken out depending on whom the prescription was issued by. When a prescription was made by a mental health professional rather than a GP this seemed to result in more books being taken out. The prescriptions seem to suggest that this difference is not due to profession but rather due to the fact that the mental health professionals always prescribed a specific book or books rather than a subject area, perhaps giving people more support to actually go and take the book out. It seems that this point should be highlighted as good practice in future.

Feedback appeared to suggest that with time and more training this scheme could become a useful part of the service offered by GPs as well as being a good way of linking patients who are often isolated into community resources such as the library. It was felt that it would take time to get the scheme embedded and made use of. In comparison to an exercise scheme recently started, it took a year for GPs to begin using this regularly whereas the books on prescription scheme had been in use for approximately 8 months at the time the audit was conducted.

In future reports it would be useful to gain formal feedback from library staff involved with the scheme. Anecdotal evidence underlines the role of the local library staff in enabling customers to access the service easily and discretely and through encouragement to borrow books that are not part of the scheme. Many of the prescriptions presented at the libraries did not prescribe a title but rather a subject and it was up to the library staff to use their knowledge of the books in the scheme to offer the most relevant title. In two cases, the subject, bereavement had not been included in the scheme, and library staff located suitable books through the normal request system.

It would also be useful to know whether follow up appointments with patients who have been prescribed a book would encourage them to take the book out and whether this had an impact on whether they made use of the book.

Unfortunately we were unable to compare the outcomes of this scheme with other evaluations around the country. This was due to the differences in information collected. This report tracked a prescription through to whether a book was issued from a library or not. We have evaluated how many prescriptions have been issued from GPs and explored the feedback from the doctors taking part. We have also looked at whether that prescription resulted in a book being taken out and asked for feedback from users of the scheme. However, many other schemes have evaluated only how many prescriptions were issued and have used this as an evaluation of the success of the scheme.. However, we have some information from a local scheme in Shropshire, which involved four GP surgeries and 3 libraries. The number of prescriptions is not given but in three months, February to April, 11 prescriptions were received by the libraries involved compared to 13 in this scheme. This shows that this scheme has been successful elsewhere, not only in terms of issuing prescriptions but also in that people have taken books out. The results of this scheme also showed that 5 people had become members of the library as a result meaning that the community element of the scheme had been successful. Participant feedback showed that the scheme had been useful and all those who'd completed feedback would recommend the scheme to others.

Overall there seems to be a positive response to the scheme and a definite opinion that the scheme should continue possibly with some changes made to make it easier and quicker for the GPs to use. In order for the scheme to be made use of more by GPs it is important that information is provided that keeps the scheme in mind. Clearly it has made a positive contribution in some patients' lives and possibly an alternative that they may not have thought of previously.

References

Frude, N (2004) 'A book prescription scheme in primary care'. *Clinical Psychology Forum* 39, 11-14.

Rachel Faul
Assistant Psychologist

Dr. Janine Soffe Caswell
Clinical Psychologist

November 2006

Steering Group Reflections on the 'BOP' Audit Report

Members of the Steering Group met to consider

- The content of the report itself
- Our understanding of how the project had progressed in comparison both to other local schemes and the original scheme set up in Cardiff.
- What next?

Report Content

- ❖ Concerns about the mismatch between the demands of the books on this list and the literacy levels of the population the prescribers deal with were a noticeable part of the feedback.
- ❖ We noted variation in the degrees to which the participating GPs had taken up the scheme, both within and between the relevant GP surgeries. In both the Sutton Hill and Stirchley Medical Practices only one GP per practice was identified as prescribing to people. Whilst in the Woodside Practice more than one mental health worker had given out prescriptions, none of either the GP prescriptions or that of an unidentified other prescriber resulted in a book being

taken out at a library; whereas just under half of those prescribed by the clinical psychologist did result in the lending of a book.

- ❖ The range and content of the specific books was highlighted. It's possible that the clinical psychologist felt more informed and able to select a specific book with a person. One hypothesis about the difference between the results of the clinical psychologist's prescribing and that of the GPs is that the books might be of most use when incorporated within 'guided self-help' rather than as 'stand-alone' self-help literature.
- ❖ Despite us providing synopses of the books in our booklet, this doesn't seem to have been noticed by some GPs who asked for summaries of the books in the evaluation feedback. This may indicate either a lack of time for GPs to digest the literature we gave out, or else inadequate advertising on our part of the content of the booklet.

Comparison to Other Schemes

- ❖ The view that 'books on prescription' is an overwhelming success is a persuasive one. Nationally, there is overwhelming evidence of the scheme functioning effectively. In our audit we also hoped to ascertain more accurate information about the usefulness of the scheme. It appeared, in relation to both Cardiff and other local schemes such as South Staffordshire and Shropshire, that whilst many prescriptions are 'dispensed' it is much less certain how many of these actually result in people accessing their local library to borrow a book.
- ❖ Nevertheless, feedback forms received from those who did use the scheme endorsed the idea of reading materials as useful, even when the particular book they had borrowed was less helpful. A comment was also received about the scheme being 'life-changing'.
- ❖ Overall, we believe the audit demonstrates that there may be much less 'pick-up' of the scheme by people than might appear from other evaluations (who haven't measured this) but that the value for those people who do use it can still be high.

What next?

- ❖ All agreed that the pilot project and evaluation had been worthwhile. It was acknowledged that the project had progressed to the extent that it had due to the good working relationships between those involved in making time to participate in addition to their other activities.
- ❖ The Library service was recognised as being highly committed to the scheme. It had enabled their staff to make links both with other community services and also those for whom the library service could be very relevant.
- ❖ It was agreed that the group had taken the 'BOP' project as far as we could, within our limited resources of time and funding.
- ❖ The scheme needs to be upheld by other agencies in a position to invest the required time and energy to nurture its future development in consideration of the feedback.
- ❖ In the meantime the scheme continues to be offered by participating surgeries and libraries as set up a year ago.

Steering Group Recommendations

- The provision of this report to the appropriate persons within the locality for their consideration as part of the future choices in local health care provision
- A Planning Day with the relevant stakeholders in Health Promotion and Primary Care to consider the future shape of the scheme
- The available titles offered within the scheme to be reviewed and that other materials, such as leaflets and e-literature, be considered for inclusion in the scheme.

Books on Prescription (T & W) Steering Group:

Brenda Cockcroft – CHEC manager and Health Promotion Specialist

Marilyn Higson – Principal Librarian, Central & South

Helen Jones – Clinical Psychologist (Shropshire PCT)

Janine Softe-Caswell – Clinical Psychologist (Shropshire PCT)

With many thanks to:

Brenda Carter – Clinical Psychologist

Rachel Faul – Assistant Psychologist

Phil Moore - Assistant Psychologist

And to Library staff at Madeley and Stirchley and the participating surgeries: Woodside, Sutton Hill, Stirchley