



Birmingham pharmacists screen for heart disease risk

Jonathan Horgan, head of medicines management, South Birmingham PCT

Jitesh Batavia, pharmacist, Bartley Green Pharmacy, south Birmingham

HEART MOT SERVICE FOR OVER 40s

When research found that male life expectancy in Birmingham was below the average compared to other similar sized cities, the three Birmingham PCTs, along with the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership commissioned community pharmacies to carry out pilot heart MOTs for those aged 40-70, to identify patients with increased risk of heart disease.

The pilot began in November 2006 with Lloyds pharmacies and later extended to independent pharmacies. Some 22 pharmacies in areas of deprivation or lower male life expectancy across Birmingham now offer the free NHS service with further extensions to include 15 more pharmacies in South Birmingham PCT underway.

WHY THE SERVICE WAS NEEDED

“The heart MOT is one initiative that is being used to improve the life expectancy of men in Birmingham,

by targeting men over 40 who are at increased risk from heart disease,” says Jonathan Horgan, head of medicines management at South Birmingham PCT.

“We needed to reach these people who were already at risk, but didn’t know it, and give an alternative to making an appointment with their GP surgery.

“We believed that community pharmacists were ideally placed to target these people who wouldn’t normally visit their doctor unless they were ill or had developed symptoms, by which time it could be too late.”

HOW THE SERVICE WORKS

The service has been widely advertised in the media, as well as with posters in participating pharmacy windows.

“Before we can offer a patient the MOT we have to first find out if they fit the criteria – aged over 40 – and that they’re not on regular heart medication.

If they are, they will already be seeing their GP regularly so we don’t need to test them,” explains Jitesh Batavia, pharmacist at Bartley Green Pharmacy, south Birmingham.

“And while the service targets men, we don’t turn women away who request it – in many cases they come back with their partner for a check-up.”

The heart MOT takes around 20 minutes and includes:

- Height, weight and waist measurement.
- Pin-prick sample of blood taken and analysed for blood glucose level and cholesterol levels.
- Blood pressure measurement.

The information is then fed into a computer, together with the patient’s age, gender and ethnicity, which then calculates the patient’s heart disease risk score, which should be less than 20 per cent. If the score exceeds 20 per cent or other referral reasons are



found, the computer generates a letter to be sent to the patient's GP and a copy is also given with verbal advice to the patient explaining the findings of the tests.

"We follow up any letters sent out with a call to the patient to check they've seen their GP. We also offer the patient lifestyle advice and refer them to other useful services such as for advice on healthy eating and exercise," says Jitesh.

HOW DOES THE SERVICE FIT IN WITH THE PHARMACIST'S NORMAL ROUTINE?

At Bartley Green Pharmacy they carry out an average of 29 heart MOTs a month. "We have four pharmacists trained to carry out the check-ups and to facilitate this we have three or four afternoons a week with sufficient staff for the heart MOTs to be carried out," says Jitesh.

"It is an extra job to fit into an already busy day, but it gives pharmacists more credibility with the public as well as building our relationship with them."

HOW SUCCESSFUL IS THE SERVICE?

The target for the initial pilot scheme was 1,500 MOTs. The completed pilot (to April 2008) is being fully evaluated but the overall target has been exceeded with at least 1,800 patients screened. Early analysis suggests 55 per cent of these were men. Of all patients, 56 per cent were referred to their GP, and 28 per cent of these referrals were due to an increased risk of vascular disease.

"Our customers have been very pleased with the service. They like having it done in the comfortable atmosphere of the pharmacy and it gives us the chance to offer them a range of preventive healthcare advice on things such as obesity, smoking cessation, alcohol intake and doing more exercise," says Jitesh.

EXPANDING THE PROFILE FOR PHARMACY

"The scheme has helped to show healthcare commissioners how looking beyond the traditional channels of healthcare delivery can pay off. If you want to reach the well public you need to include a range of strategies – pharmacy is an excellent way of reaching these people. And the same type of service could be applied to diabetes screening too," says Jonathan Horgan.

"We are very proud of what we've achieved with the heart MOT service – it makes us an important part of the Government's long-term plan for the prevention of serious health problems," says Jitesh Batavia.

For more information

www.birminghamheartmot.nhs.uk

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