



# Pharmacists help fight obesity in Coventry

Meera Sharma, professional services manager, Unichem Ltd.

## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT SERVICE, COVENTRY TEACHING PCT

In Coventry there are approximately 52,000 obese adults, with 60 per cent of the population eating less than the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. While GPs were able to refer obese patients to a dietician for specialist help, there was no provision for patients who were still overweight but didn't fall into this category.

The PCT decided that community pharmacists could help fill this gap by providing weight management advice and support to these patients from their local pharmacy. The service began as a 12 month pilot in 10 pharmacies in January 2007 and was so successful that funding has been extended by the PCT and four more pharmacies are now involved.

## WHY THE SERVICE IS NEEDED

Obesity, and in particular central obesity where increased fat is mainly around the waist and abdomen, increases the risk of developing heart disease and type II diabetes. In men, waist measurements over 102cm, and

in women over 88cm, increases this risk significantly (in patients of Asian origin it is 90cm and 80cm respectively). Obesity also increases the risk of certain cancers and contributes to arthritis, gallstones, infertility and gynaecological problems. By 2010 it is predicted that 23 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men will be obese.

The nation's weight problem is costing the NHS money – at least £500 million a year in treatment costs to the NHS and in excess of £200m to the wider economy. These costs are expected to escalate as obesity continues to spiral.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE SERVICE?

"The service is available to adults over the age of 18 who have a BMI of between 30 and 38 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and have at least one established risk factor. The risk factors include hypertension, type II diabetes, hyperlipidaemia and increased waist circumference," says Meera Sharma, professional services manager at Unichem Ltd.

## WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE SERVICE?

During the pilot, 10 pharmacies in Coventry provided the weight management service, with a target of helping 15 patients per pharmacy during the 12 months. "The current number on the scheme is 160 and 86 more patients are being recruited onto it this year," says Meera.

The weight management service was set up collaboratively with a number of stakeholders including the Department of Health, five pharmaceutical companies, Unichem Professional Services and leading obesity experts including Dr Terry Maguire.

"An additional five pharmacies are now participating in the scheme and the vision for Coventry PCT is to roll out the service through all pharmacies in the future, once adequate training can be provided," says Meera.



## HOW DOES THE PROGRAMME WORK?

Each patient is first assessed by the pharmacist, who takes the patient's BMI, waist measurement, blood pressure and tests their blood glucose and cholesterol levels.

The patient is then given a weight management programme diary, an appointment card and a weight loss advice booklet. They are set targets for a diet and exercise plan, aiming for a five per cent weight loss by the end of the programme. Patients are referred to their GP for any monitoring parameters that fall outside of the service protocol. They are then booked in for a series of 11 follow-up meetings with the pharmacist over the course of the next 12 months.

## HOW SUCCESSFUL IS THE PROGRAMME?

An evaluation study during the interim of the pilot found that 68 per cent of participants had lost weight, losing an average of 0.62 of their BMI. The

average waist measurement of patients was 111cm at the start – 72 per cent had reduced this by an average of 3.37cm each. Some 63 patients were referred to their GP for management of health conditions – 31 per cent for hypertension, 18 per cent for diabetes, 27 per cent for obesity and 23 per cent for heart conditions.

“The programme builds on the vision of pharmacy, as outlined in the recent White Paper (*Pharmacy in England: building on strengths – delivering the future*), and Gul Root, the principal pharmaceutical officer for the Department of Health, has contributed funding towards the second year of the service, thanks to its demonstration of this vision,” says Meera.

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK

“GPs were sceptical at the start of the programme, however this view is changing as results are being demonstrated and the importance of this service is being highlighted,” says Meera. “Patients have been very

positive about the service. They find it easy to access, in a non-threatening environment and changes consist of small lifestyle changes rather than specific diets.”

There has been lots of interest from other PCTs. “This should ensure that what we've learnt from this service can be applied for a national roll-out as appropriate. It is a good demonstration of what can be achieved when industry and the NHS work together as partners for the benefit of patients,” says Meera.

## BREAKING NEW GROUND

“Weight management through pharmacy is not a new idea, but providing it robustly and innovatively is new. This shows how the community pharmacy new contract has been used effectively as a platform to create the service design, implementation and evaluation. Given the right skills and training, pharmacy can provide innovative services such as this very efficiently,” concludes Meera.

**Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain**  
1 Lambeth High Street  
London SE1 7JN  
Tel: 020 7735 9141  
Fax: 020 7735 7629  
e-mail: [pr@rpsgb.org](mailto:pr@rpsgb.org)  
[www.rpsgb.org](http://www.rpsgb.org)

**Scottish Office**  
36 York Place  
Edinburgh EH1 3HU  
Tel: 0131 556 4386  
Fax: 0131 558 8850  
e-mail: [scotinfo@rpsgb.org](mailto:scotinfo@rpsgb.org)  
[www.rpsgb.org/scotland](http://www.rpsgb.org/scotland)

**Welsh Office**  
Unit 2, Ashtree Court  
Woodsy Close  
Cardiff Gate Business Park  
Cardiff CF23 8RW  
Tel: 029 2073 0310  
Fax: 029 2073 0311  
e-mail: [wales@rpsgb.org](mailto:wales@rpsgb.org)  
[www.rpsgb.org/wales](http://www.rpsgb.org/wales)



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