



Pioneer Scheme Day-release Programme

Wednesday 1st March 2017

Horselethill Road, Glasgow

Learning from the Links Worker Programme

Dr Peter Cawston, Garscadden Burn Medical Practice

The LINKS approach – “Learn. Inspire. Network. Know. Share”

Dr Peter Cawston shared the story of the development of the LINKS Worker programme and described how his upbringing shaped his interest in social justice, his subsequent career path, and his passion for this project. We talked about the lessons learned from the project so far.

Dr Cawston described the influence of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire’s work and how this can be applied to our roles as GPs to appreciate:

- 1) The impact of our privilege and what this brings to, or takes from, our consulting.
- 2) The barriers that are perpetuated by current systems (Few GPs live in deprived areas, creating social distance)
- 3) Unintended negative consequences of healthcare (fostering dependence on drugs etc. and eroding the sense of agency in individuals and communities, undermining political activism)
- 4) Learning needs to be a shared process where the learner (in this case the patient/ patient community) can co-create knowledge that empowers them to be self-reliant and be well.

The LINKS Worker Programme is a partnership between The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) and the Deep End GP Group funded by the Scottish Government. It was conceptualised with input from ‘teams at the coal-face’ using uniquely designed methods backed by a mix of academic research and clinical instinct. The competitively recruited primary care teams aim to help patients live well in their community and make the best use of community resources and promote self-reliance.

This is done partly by funding one full time 'Community Links Practitioner' per practice to join 7 existing Deep End GP practices in Glasgow since April 2014 – it also provides funding support for the practices involved to improve their existing services and have a forum for the practices to share knowledge and learning with other practices acting as controls.

The LINKS worker (LW) works one-on-one with individuals in their allocated practice to not only address social needs of these patients and free up clinical time but to promote learning and foster team learning. The initial 2 year funding has now been extended for another 3 years to 2018.

The LW role aims to provide consistent support to some of the most vulnerable patients who are often left isolated by gaps in health care provision such as mental health and addiction support which can be inconsistent due to pressures on the system.

Dr Cawston described 7 capacities to develop in primary care teams:

- 1) TEAM WELLBEING (team yoga, walks, sport days)
- 2) SHARING LEARNING (to share and establish good practice across teams)
- 3) AWARENESS OF SOCIAL CONTEXT (to think relevantly and offer relevant interventions)
- 4) INTELLIGENCE / KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (well-curated clear information and knowledge of resources)
- 5) SIGNPOSTING (easy algorithm and timeframe for patient to access the resource)
- 6) PROBLEM SOLVING (thinking inventively to help access resources and overcome barriers)
- 7) NETWORK BUILDING – (official or word of mouth links with housing, education, prison service, patient networks etc.)

More information on the Links Approach can be found here: <http://links.alliance-scotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Defining-the-Links-Approach-Module-Final.pdf>

KEY SUMMARY POINTS:

- Being mindful of the varied impact of the GP profession on communities as a whole
- Strategies to empower staff and patients
- Leadership to promote staff and patient well being
- Gather relevant, good quality knowledge and encourage effective distribution of knowledge to staff and patients.