

Equitable place based health and care theme Summary of Findings: Social Prescribing

About the research

Three topics, social prescribing, social isolation and air pollution, have been identified as priority research issues for the Equitable Place Based Health and Care (EPHC) theme of ARC North West Coast. Between November 2019 and January 2020, a series of ten group conversations were conducted in the region to understand public perspectives on these issues. A workshop was also held with members of the public, ARC staff and members attending the ARC Fest 1 event. In total, 116 people took part in these discussions. This summary outlines key issues raised in these conversations about social prescribing. The findings from these conversations are now being used to inform the focus of future research.

Validation and awareness of issue:

- There were wide variations in the level of awareness of social prescribing (SP). In general, professionals had some knowledge, to varying degrees, and most lay people had not heard the phrase. Some members of the public, however, were aware of similar initiatives such as health trainers, community connectors and some connected the concept of SP to activities they had been referred to for dietary advice and weight loss.
- There were discussions about the language being used in relation to SP and a suggestion from some that it was not new, but a newly 'medicalised' name for a longstanding, often more community-based activity.

Role of communities

- There was a view that medical professionals need to think differently about the underlying causes of patients' health issue if SP is to work
- The public need to know more about SP and available activities so they can self-refer.
- Sharing stories about experiences of SP and word of mouth about positive experiences of SP could be one way of encouraging referrals and engagement.
- A range of potential referrers within community settings were mentioned including health visitors, schools, children's centres, community organisations, housing providers and community policing.

Challenges and considerations

- The personal characteristics and role of the link worker role was seen to be crucial in facilitating access and engagement.
- The 'digital divide' needs to be considered in the distribution of information
- Other barriers to access were discussed including transport to SP activities/provision and any charges levied.
- The lack of resources in the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the impact of services/centres that had closed were also raised as issues. Participants questioned whether the VCS could meet the demand, and if the current SP rollout might create unrealistic expectations.
- Questions were also asked about how the impact of SP was going to be measured including, for example, would the community be involved? What constitutes a good outcome or service? Would unmet need be recorded?

Further information

The Applied Research Collaboration North West Coast (ARC NWC) consists of health and social care providers, NHS commissioners, local authorities, universities, public advisers, the Innovation Agency (Academic Health Science Network), working together to learn more about these health inequalities, and overcome the barriers around translating these discoveries in health research into practice which improves lives.

The 'Equitable Place-based Health and Care' (EPHC) theme aims to build collaborations between residents, local stakeholders and researchers, so that individuals and communities can exert greater influence over decision making processes that affect their lives within the places they live and work. The theme's focus is to support and work with local systems aiming to integrate health and social care so that they are able to operate more responsively to the needs of people, communities and places.

To download these summaries, or find out more about the EPHC theme, visit: <https://arc-nwc.nihr.ac.uk/equitable-place-based-health-and-care/> or contact an ARC researcher: Fiona Ward (f.j.ward@lancaster.ac.uk)

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