

INVOLVING PATIENTS, CARERS AND COMMUNITIES IN SHAPING SOCIAL PRESCRIBING ACTIVITIES

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Theme: Health & Care Across the Life Course

Background

Social prescribing (SP) enables primary healthcare providers to connect patients (usually through a link worker) to non-clinical organisations in their community, as a means of supporting their wellbeing. Through activities such as exercise groups and art classes, SP can create frameworks of community-based support tailored to the individual needs of patients and their carers, whilst also reducing burden on primary care services. By directing patients to appropriate community organisations equipped to tackle social, rather than medical, determinants of health, SP programmes may also reduce health inequalities across society. In 2019, the NHS Long Term Plan pledged that in England 1000 trained social prescribing link workers would be in post by 2021, and around 900,000 referrals would be made by 2023/24.

Despite this recent growth in SP across the UK, approaches to the practice vary considerably and current evidence does not yet provide a full understanding of the elements needed to make programmes effective and sustainable (Bikerdike, Booth, Wilson, Farley & Wright, 2017). Multi-stakeholder involvement has been highlighted as one key component of successful SP programmes (Bertotti et al., 2018; Dayson, 2017), with the insights of professionals, service users and community organisations used to co-produce services that meet local needs.

Aims of project

- Investigate how social prescribing functions across the North West Coast, with a focus on the role of VCFS organisations, to map out a SP "eco-system" and identify successful models and potential barriers to stakeholder "buy-in"
- Explore how community- led social prescribing activities can effectively and sustainably support the management of long-term illnesses in the home for both patients and carers
- Examine the impact of social prescribing on health inequalities amongst marginalised communities and its potential for health inequalities