

Case Study: Integration of dietitians in primary care

CHALLENGE

As part of the North West London level one enhanced diabetes specification, there was a requirement to provide virtual group consultations (VGCs) to patients on the diabetes register.

This was quite challenging as VGCs were a new concept, not being delivered in Hounslow. There were lots of mobilisation issues and admin demands which caused anxiety, as the VGCs contributed towards quite a large amount of the diabetes payments for PCNs.

During the early stages when VGCs launched in April 2022, there were high levels of Did Not Attend (DNAs) and a genuine risk of not achieving the targets.



SOLUTION

Hounslow PCNs decided to collaboratively employ some dietitians under the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS). The PCN dietitians would not only lead the VGCs from a clinical perspective, but they would also take on a project management role. The original intention was also to recruit a podiatrist, but this was unsuccessful, and so was put on hold.

Hounslow's PCNs successfully recruited three dietitians to work across the five PCNs. The dietitians were employed by HRCH, as the host organisation for Hounslow Consortium and its five PCNs. The dietitians worked one day a week in the diabetes community service, delivering structured education and maintaining their professional links with the trust. During the other four days, they were delivering VGCs in the PCNs.

The priority for the dietitians was to address the high DNA rates and develop the model to increase patient engagement and uptake, as well as patient experience.

Working with the PCN operational managers and other support staff, trained in VGCs, the dietitians transformed the existing VGCs into webinars which they found more successful.

Lorraine Makin, Associate Director for Primary Care Networks, HRCH said, "We found that many patients didn't feel comfortable actively participating in virtual group consultations, which was thought to be driving the high DNA rates. Our lead dietitian proposed moving to a webinar-based model. This meant that patients could choose whether to actively engage and ask questions, or just observe and listen based on what felt more comfortable, and we found the DNA rate reduced." Lorraine continues, "the North West London diabetes team were really flexible and listened to our challenges, which supported us to develop an approach that worked better for our borough and its patients."

BENEFITS

After reshaping the focus and approach, the dietitians were able to increase engagement, reduce DNA rates and deliver the 7.5% target across Hounslow, generating £300k income for the PCNs. Since the approach was changed in September 2022, attendance has dramatically increased with average monthly webinar attendance being between 45-55, depending on the PCN. The webinar approach has also been met with positive feedback:

"Information was relevant to me as a diabetic. I found it really good when you saw the other participants on the talk too who are in the same boat as me and I felt that I am not alone other people are living with diabetes too." Patient feedback post-webinar

"It is a very good session, the presenter /dietician is knowledgeable and understands the different food habits and suggested good alternatives to support our dietary plans" Patient feedback post-webinar

In 2023/24, the requirements of the specification have moved away from mandatory VGCs to focus on the percentage of patients attending a structured learning programme for diabetes. Taking learning from the engagement with the webinars, the PCNs will now focus on introducing a PCN-based 'first steps' taster session, delivered by the PCN dietitians as a pathway to the community service structured education programme. There will be no gap between the PCN dietitian and community service for patients, who will be directly referred by the PCN dietitian following the first steps programme.

VGCs will remain, although reduced in number, for patients who prefer this consultation model. PCNs are still exploring how better to manage challenges such as the administrative burden of VGCs, for example harnessing other support services run by Hounslow Consortium as the Primary Care Directorate in HRCH.

"OUR PCN DIETITIANS HAVE BEEN CRUCIAL IN THE DELIVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUAL GROUP CLINICS. SINCE WE INTRODUCED THESE ROLES IN OUR DIABETES PATHWAY, THEY'VE BEEN REALLY PROACTIVE AND HAVE DRIVEN LOCAL PERFORMANCE. THEIR EXPERTISE AS PART OF OUR PRIMARY CARE TEAM HAS NOT ONLY BEEN AN IMPORTANT BENEFIT TO OUR PATIENTS LIVING WITH DIABETES, BUT IT ALSO HELPS DRIVE INCOME INTO THE PCNS, WHICH CAN THEN BE REINVESTED INTO SERVICES FOR OUR PATIENTS."

DR RASHMI SINGH, CLINICAL DIRECTOR FOR GREAT WEST ROAD



Hounslow Consortium provides professional support to the PCNs and their member practices. It works across the full portfolio of General Practice services, with a primary focus on supporting the delivery of the PCN contract and achieving the best outcome for practices, patients and the workforce.

For further information about this case study please contact hrch.hounslowconsortium@nhs.net.



HRCH provides community health services for around 523,000 people registered with GPs in the London boroughs of Hounslow and Richmond, but also serves a wider population across south west London for a range of more specialist services.

HRCH has hosted Hounslow Consortium and its five PCNs, forming its Primary Care Directorate, since October 2021.