

Care navigators making a difference Westongrove Partnership

Westongrove Partnership in Aylesbury is using a new team of care navigators to improve patient experience, helping them get the right help when they need it, and freeing up GP time.

By accessing funding from Buckinghamshire CCG the practice has been able to offer care navigator training to 6 members of their staff, including individuals from their reception and administration teams. So far (July 2018), they have completed tier 1 training, giving them knowledge about the sources of help available to Buckinghamshire residents from local charities or community groups. Tier 2 training will give them additional skills on dealing with people such as consultation skills, managing boundaries and behavioural management.

“Why did I want to become a care navigator? Empowering patients is so important. We can help a patient help themselves; you give them the cards and ask them what they want to do.” Honor, administrator and care navigator, Westongrove Partnership

Operations and Development Manager Sarah Walker’s vision for the care navigators is that they become an integral part of the multi-disciplinary team. Once tier 2 training has been completed she has plans to promote how the care navigators can help their patients, have them run group sessions with patients, accept referrals from the GPs and offer self-referral to patients.

“There are so many opportunities. My mind is full of different ways we can deliver improvements and different ways we can use, and spread, the care navigators’ skills. We’re upskilling our practice team by having specialists who have the time and the skills to get to the real issue and reason why someone has come to see us without a medical need.” Sarah Walker, Operations and Development Manager, Westongrove Partnership

Sarah acknowledges that this will have an impact on day jobs of the care navigators, but firmly believes that making some changes to processes will bring huge benefits. Both she and the GP partners are committed to making sure the care navigators have the opportunities to use their skills and have a positive impact on patient experience and GP time.

Where the care navigators have helped:

- A gentleman came to the surgery to book an appointment to see a GP, but when the care navigator spoke with him, it became apparent that he didn’t have a clinical need but would benefit from swift access to Citizens Advice. The Care Navigator spent time with him, signposting him to the CAB service that was then able to support and advise him. Had he booked a GP appointment it wouldn’t have been appropriate and would have caused a delay to him accessing the support he needed.
- Some patients require transport in order to attend hospital appointments, but not all patients are eligible for transport provided by South Central Ambulance Service. Following their tier one training, the care navigators are now aware of other affordable transport options available and are able to pass these details to patients who would otherwise struggle to attend their appointments.
- School holidays can be stressful times for parents trying to juggle working and childcare, but the care navigators were able to put a mum in contact with a service that Buckinghamshire County Council

run that offers various support options to eligible parents and children. The mum contacted the department, and has been able to access an affordable pay as you go holiday play scheme where her child also receives a lunch. This has allowed her child to have fun and make new friends in a safe environment, whilst allowing mum to continue with her paid job, plus have a little time to get some other jobs completed. She was very thankful for receiving the information.

How to make the care navigator role work:

- Ensure commitment from GP practice partners and managers to support the care navigators in their training and as they begin to use their skills
- Ensure the care navigators have the chance to use, practise and extend their skills. This might mean changing some established work processes but unless this happens the full benefit for both patients and the practice will not be realised
- Create opportunities for the care navigators to network and share their experiences and learning; either within one practice or at cluster or locality level
- Don't think that you're losing a receptionist; think that you're gaining a skilled member of your integrated team

Benefits for local residents and patients:

- Empowering patients to manage their own needs
- Helping them find the right support locally
- Increased social interaction to reduce social isolation

Benefits for GP practices:

- Freeing up GP and nursing time by having a team of experts who can help find the right non-clinical support for patients
- Increasing the skills of multi-disciplinary teams
- Empowering staff, increased job satisfaction and staff retention

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