

Annual Health Checks for Learning Disabilities in Torbay

Background

People with learning disabilities have significantly lower life expectancy than the general population. Figures from NHS Digital showed that females with a learning disability had an 18-year lower life expectancy than the general population, while males with a learning disability had a 14-year lower life expectancy.

Ref: www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/people-with-learning-disabilities-have-significantly-lower-life-expectancy-than-the-general-population

People with learning disabilities often have difficulty in recognising illness, communicating their needs and using health services. Research shows that regular health checks for people with learning disabilities often uncover treatable health conditions. Most of these are simple to treat and make the person feel better. Sometimes serious illnesses such as cancer are found at an early stage, when they can be treated.

The Annual Health Check is also a chance for the person to get used to going to their GP practice, which reduces their fear of going at other times.

Ref www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/annual-health-checks/#what-are-the-benefits-of-an-annual-health-check

Autism/ASD – Although people with Autism do not have a learning difficulty appropriate support to access their GP practice is still required. If the only contact made with the surgery and GP is when you feel ill and are experiencing unpleasant sensory stimuli this creates a negative experience that is to be avoided. Therefore health conditions are often ignored until they become more severe. The surgery environment has different sensory conditions each visit, they are required to speak to a GP they don't really know and the outcome of the visit cannot be predicted. Any one of these external factors can cause anxiety and stress which when put together can become insurmountable.

Although there is no legal requirement or expectation for NHS to provide this service it would be best practice.

Purpose

To map the offer being made by GP surgeries across Torbay to people with learning disabilities in a timely manner for transition to adult service. Provide the CCG with statistics for future provision.

1. **Current offer states:**

- a. People aged 14 and over who have been assessed as having moderate, severe or profound learning disabilities, or people with a mild learning disability who have other complex health needs, are entitled to a free annual health check.
www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/annual-health-checks/

2. We were advised by Brunel GP surgery that patients known to have a Learning Disability are flagged on the IT system and that they would be offered a double appointment at the

time of booking. This would provide sufficient time for the patient/GP to ensure all current issues are addressed.

3. Are patients with Autism/ASD but without learning difficulties offered options 1 & 2?

Process

- We circulated the questionnaire to all surgeries in Torbay and the surrounding area via e-mail provided to us by the CCG.
- We also placed on our website.
- We received 11 responses in total broken down as follows:
 - 9 Torbay based surgeries
 - 1 surrounding area surgery
 - 1 Parent
- Full results are attached.

Findings

- 1. Does your surgery offer annual healthchecks for children and YP with Learning disabilities?**

All of the surgeries stated that they automatically offer health checks to children and young people with L.D. In hindsight, we wish that we had been more specific in regards to the age that the health checks are offered. We did get 3 different results to this question as 2 parent carers completed the form. One parent carer stated that they had to request the check once they were aware that it existed. Brunel Surgery advised that they are “now offered from age 14 I think” and Kingsteignton offer checks automatically to over 16 year olds.

- 2. Does your surgery offer healthchecks to children and YP who are diagnosed as being somewhere on the autistic spectrum?**

Only 2 surgeries offer this.

- 3. At your surgery, who completes the healthcheck?**

This question revealed that there is no consistent approach delivered by any of the surgeries within the bay, with GP's, healthcare assistants and nurses completing the health checks for L.D.

- 4. When completed, who receives copies of the healthcheck?**

Again this is inconsistent with 5 surgeries giving the patient a copy. (This document could be used to support medical evidence at reviews)

- 5. Does your surgery automatically book patients with learning disabilities, 'double appointments'?**

In regarding double appointments, with only 4 of the 11 replies received stated that they do offer double appointments to those L.D.

6. Does your surgery automatically book double appointments for patients on the autistic spectrum?

The statistics are even lower if you are on the Autistic spectrum, with only 1 of the 11 replies stating that they do offer double appointments to those on the Autistic spectrum.

Conclusions

- GP surgeries are unaware that these healthchecks should begin at age 14 to enhance transition to adult services.
- There is a disparity between learning disabilities and Autism which would be address by extending the existing offer to those on the spectrum. This then has the potential to avoid future acute services being required at greater cost to NHS/social care budgets.
- Despite the inconsistency of provision those receiving the services that have fed back to us that it works well. Going forward it would be good to have a best practice guideline from the NHS so all surgeries have clear protocols.
- There is no current mechanism for them to inform health/social care of future commissioning and GPs do not understand that this is a necessary requirement to ensure service provision is available.
- CCG need to work with surgeries to raise their understanding of the wider uses for the healthchecks and in turn ensure information is provided for commissioning decisions.

Other issues encountered:

We were not expecting this survey to take a long time or to encounter any difficulties in getting the survey completed by each surgery. However we soon realised that the recent takeover and amalgamation of surgeries (16 GP surgeries groups across the bay), now means that it is very difficult to contact a specific surgery, for example Barton Surgery on Barton Hill Way, is overseen by Chelston Hall surgery, 2 miles away on Old Mill Road. The only contact details provided for Barton are the same email and telephone number for Chelston hall Surgery. This means that we do not have and were unable to get results for each surgery in its own right, but instead have the facts from the lead surgery. Yet as we see the results, regarding who 'completes' the health check, are all different, this could suggest that all surgeries complete this process in their 'own way'. We therefore feel that more accurate results could be produced if there was the facility to contact an individual for each site, within each of the surgery groups.

We sent this survey out 3 times beginning in March, with the last survey sent Friday 15th June; phone calls were made to the lead surgeries on the 19th June asking them to complete the survey over the phone. Of all the surgeries called, none knew what we were referring to, in addition they were unable to retrieve the survey from the 'general enquiries inbox', despite the last one being sent the previous Friday. The Friday email was also sent individually to each surgery so that it could not be lost within the 'SPAM' folder. This potentially raises concerns over the accessibility of the 'general enquiry inbox' to the surgery, staff and consequential implications that this could have for a patient who may be attempting to contact the surgery in this way. It should be noted that potentially patients who are not registered for patient access could use the 'general enquiry box' to contact their surgery.



Furthermore, if there is only one email address to be used by 5 surgeries, it is not unreasonable that they would be unable to find an email that was sent four days previously. Although this could be an issue for concern as we have sent the survey 3 times, with less than half of our intended surgeries actually replying independently.