

Media release

Social prescribing – providing support during COVID-19

19 May 2020

Lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic can be extremely difficult for some people who are experiencing loneliness, anxiety and other non-medical pressures. A scheme to provide appropriate emotional and practical support to members of the community who are isolated or struggling is available in the Guildford and Waverley area. In the same way that a patient with a prescription can get their medication from a pharmacist, social prescribing enables people to access the services that will help them for non- medical individual support.

Social prescribing is a way for local authorities, GPs, and Adult Social Care to refer people to a link worker. Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs) give people time, helping them to focus on ‘what matters to me’ and taking a holistic approach to health and wellbeing.

Social prescribing works for a wide range of people, including those:

- with one or more long-term conditions
- who need support with their mental health
- who are lonely or isolated
- who have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

SPLWs provide practical help by linking people with local volunteer schemes or NHS responders. Emotional support can also come from SPLWs themselves who make regular welfare calls to their ‘clients’. SPLWs can also link those in need to community-based emotional support, befriending services as well as signpost to mental health support services such as IAPT.

Despite the current restrictions, social prescribing can still enable people to access regular activities like social groups and exercise classes, the only difference is that rather than face-to-face it will be carried out online via video conferencing apps.

[Some examples of how SPLWs can connect and provide support](#)

Mr A is in his 90s and cares for his wife who has dementia. At the start of lockdown his SPLW linked him to his local volunteer group. This enabled the couple to continue to get their shopping and prescriptions. However, as lockdown has carried on, Mr A started to feel the strain due to isolation and his wife’s dementia. His SPLW picked up on the drop in his

mood during their weekly welfare telephone calls. As a result, she was able to refer Mr A to the RAF Benevolent Fund who work in partnership with The Silver Line and a telephone friendship group. This network provides access to a weekly telephone call with six other RAF veterans; giving him something to look forward to each week.

Mr S has a history of anxiety and poor physical health. His anxiety has been steadily increasing since the beginning of lockdown but he has been able to talk through his anxieties and share his feelings about living alone during this time with a SPLW.

He was very worried about the change to his routine and wanted to continue to do his shopping at the supermarket. His SPLW arranged regular food deliveries and linked him to his local volunteer scheme so they could collect his prescriptions from the Pharmacy. The SPLW also referred Mr S to an NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service to help with his increasing anxiety levels that he has been experiencing during this period.

Mrs W has a history of mental health and a physical disability. She is also caring for her husband who has suffered a recent illness. She was struggling with the loss of her routine; especially the social groups she has come to rely on for her emotional wellbeing. With the help of her SPLW she was connected to a group that provides technology support for older and disabled people. As a result, Mrs W has been able to participate in her weekly groups online. This has made her feel less isolated and more positive about the current situation.

Vicky Stobbart, Managing Director, Guildford and Waverley ICP said:

“It is so encouraging to see the great work that is taking place in our community, particularly for those who are feeling lonely and anxious during these difficult times. Social prescribing can link people with many sources of support within the community. It provides a non-medical referral option that can operate alongside existing treatments to improve health and wellbeing.”

If a member of your family, a neighbour or someone you know is struggling at the moment please let them know about the support that is available to them through social prescribing. SPLWs can provide links to appropriate advice, support and networks. Referrals can be made by a GP.

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For more information please contact the Press Office on 07825 946 551

Note to editors

About Surrey Heartlands CCG

Surrey Heartlands CCG is the merged Clinical Commissioning Group which formed in April 2020 combining East Surrey, Guildford and Waverley, North West Surrey and Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Groups. The CCG is part of the [Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership](#), which covers a population of over one million people.