

Improving under-represented groups' access to mental health services: Wokingham

The challenge

Data suggested cases of depression were underdiagnosed within the black patient population

Follow-up work revealed low levels of engagement with mental health services by black people in the local community

The approach

Programme of work to support improved access to and engagement with mental health services for black people in Wokingham, comprising:

Data analysis: identifying potential cases

Record management: checking service user registers

Improving access: annual health check invitations

Engagement: working with local authority and voluntary sector

Outcomes

Proportion of black people diagnosed with depression increased by 1.1 percentage points

57 staff attended equality, diversity and inclusion training

Plans to roll the approach out to other under-represented populations

Leadership lessons



Be clear with partners about objectives and expectations from the outset



Be transparent and work to manage expectations if issues arise that are likely to affect project uptake



Use 'soft' leadership skills to ensure colleagues and partners remain motivated



Work with partners and bring stakeholders' ideas into the project design where possible

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The challenge

Following analysis of population health data, leaders at Wokingham North Primary Care Network (PCN) identified that cases of depression were likely to be underdiagnosed within the local black patient population. Through further local engagement, the PCN team confirmed that engagement with mental health services by black people in Wokingham was low.

PCN staff established a programme to increase access to mental health services for black people living in Wokingham by improving engagement with mental health services and increasing the number of black patients on mental health registers.

The approach

The programme's three main objectives were to:

- increase the number of black people experiencing mental health issues engaging with services
- encourage people who needed support to access it
- ensure that those who were already engaged were being offered appropriate support.

PCN staff analysed patient data to identify members of the local black population who were diagnosed with anxiety, depression and more complex mental health conditions. They checked that identified

service users were listed on appropriate mental health registers and being invited to attend annual health checks. The project team is also working with the Mental Health Community Alliance and has assigned a severe mental illness (SMI) health worker to encourage health check uptake.

With Wokingham Borough Council, a scheme was set up to offer free mental health first aider training for people within the black community. The council also put in place equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) training for local primary care staff, and it is working with mental health charity MIND to produce a video to promote local mental health services.

Outcomes

Since the project started, the number of black service users identified as needing a review for addition to a mental health register has doubled. The proportion of black people diagnosed with depression has begun to increase, moving from 2 per cent to 3.1 per cent initially, compared with 8 per cent of the total patient population.

Fifty-seven primary care staff from clinical and non-clinical roles have attended EDI training. However, as yet, nobody has taken up the offer of free mental health first aider training, suggesting more work is needed to make mental health services accessible.

The PCN is now looking to use the approach to find other populations who appear to be using services less intensively than might be expected.

Leadership lessons

Jo Barrett, Wokingham North PCN's transformation lead, believes that effective partnership working has been key to the project's success so far. Jo worked with local government and voluntary sector colleagues to design and set up the project.

“Working on the project demonstrated the importance of understanding the objectives and expectations of the different parties from the beginning. You have to be clear about what you will be able to provide. I try to clarify what the end goal will look like.”

During the project, Jo needed to manage partners' expectations around data gathering and training, because of the severe capacity constraints primary care staff were facing. She did so by being honest about the challenges within the primary care system. Similarly, she learned a great deal about challenges her peers working in local government were experiencing.

Jo values soft leadership skills and believes it is important to motivate people and to embrace their ideas as part of implementing a project.

“There were elements of the project that were really good that we did and elements of the project that were really good that local government did.”