

Summary of

“Helping Ourselves”: A health engagement process for Wirral male carers

April 2014 - March 2015

Introduction

Holistic Health care services have been made available to unpaid Wirral carers for three years, through Public Health and Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group funding. Over the first two years, it was acknowledged that male carers were under-represented (20%) in those seeking support. In order to address this inequality, a health engagement process modelled on the Australian “pit-stop” brief intervention was implemented, which focused exclusively on male carer needs.

A 2-hour holistic health check was the entry point to a range of services including traditional acupuncture, remedial massage, Bach flower therapy, Tibetan sound healing, food energetics dietary therapy and meditation, and all tailored according to individual need.

Methodology

Data analysis of 42* exit questionnaires, completed at the end of a 6-week course of acupuncture /remedial massage treatments or the 12-hour food energetics course, was carried out by two Liverpool University Medical students, as part of their Research and Scholarship module. The questionnaires were designed to assess the effectiveness of treatments and quality of service. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were applied in analysis.

Results

Quantitative analysis demonstrated a 100% satisfaction with the quality of the service.

The holistic health check was perceived as a useful and thought-provoking entry point into the service.

The project provided acupuncture and remedial massage treatments as a consequence of which, participants noted a reduction in physical symptoms, improved mood, relaxation and coping abilities, and a positive experience of care.

Lifestyle changes included increase in exercise, healthier diet, decrease in alcohol consumption and smoking, postural changes in lifting techniques, improved socialisation, more personal time, greater self-reflection and awareness and increased carer confidence in their own abilities/judgement.

Conclusions

Gender exclusivity was an important factor in attracting 67** male carers to the service.

Carers experienced a wide range of positive benefits leading to improved health and quality of life then initiated changes leading to a more balanced healthy lifestyle.

Improvements in physical, mental and emotional health enabled carers to become more effective in their caring role.

Participants highlighted a continuing need for such an intervention though further funding would be required in order to offer this service to more male carers

* Number of questionnaires considered for interim analysis

** Carers were seen over the course of the whole project