

Wigan PCNs take to the leisure centre in liver screening pilot

Case study summary

Mike Shinks, a nurse at Wigan Borough Federated Healthcare Ltd, explains how running a national liver pilot from a Wigan leisure centre enables him and his team to offer a more holistic service to patients.

Background

Wigan Borough Federated Healthcare Ltd supports two Primary Care Networks – Wigan North and Wigan Central, which cover a total of 13 GP practices.

During the pandemic they worked with Wigan Council, which runs Robin Park Leisure Centre, to deliver Covid vaccination clinics in the heart of the community.

The relationship has continued and the leisure centre has converted some of its rooms to accommodate regular NHS Health Check clinics on behalf of the two PCNs.

These operate five days a week between 8am and 8pm, and are proving popular with patients as they are in a location and at a time to suit them. This arrangement also takes some of the burden off GP surgeries.

When NHS England sought applications for its national initiative to check for liver cancer in high-risk communities, Wigan Borough Federated Healthcare Ltd put forward the idea of operating the pilot from its leisure centre clinics.

Only one in three liver cancers are diagnosed at an early stage but if caught early, patients have a 70 to 90 per cent chance of survival for five years or more with treatment.

How it works

The team at Wigan have identified patients who meet the following high-risk criteria: an alcohol consumption of more than 30 units per week, diagnosed with a fatty liver, with a BMI of more than 30, or with type 2 diabetes.

They contact people by text message, inviting them for a chat about their liver health, and of the 6,300-plus people approached so far, around 19 per cent responded.

Patients are invited to the leisure centre clinics for a FIB 4 blood test, to check for their risk of fibrosis in the liver.

Twice a week, blood samples are sent off to the phlebotomy labs at Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust via the Greater Manchester Blood Bikes charity.

The clinical team at Robin Park can access the results first thing the following morning and if necessary, they can invite the patient in for a scan later that same day.

The portable scanner, which is on loan from NHSE for the duration of the pilot, is around the size of a laptop so assessments can take place in the clinic rooms in under 30 minutes.

Results and further action can be discussed immediately.

In some cases, patients are referred to secondary care hepatology and placed on the hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) pathway for liver cancer. In others, they are referred for an Enhanced Liver Fibrosis (ELF) test.

Where patients don't require further assessment or treatment, the clinical team take the opportunity to offer lifestyle advice where appropriate.

Benefits for patients and staff

Although patients are invited based on high-risk factors, they are showing no symptoms.

If unchecked, a damaged liver can go beyond the point of repair. However, if the risk of damage is known, many cases can be turned around with a healthier approach to alcohol and food.

Mike said: "Even if a scan delivers a good result, we can chat about the benefits of making lifestyle changes. The Health Check training kicks in and we have the time to chat properly, and people talk more openly to us.

"Located where we are means we can offer a wraparound service. We can recommend people to look at the [Be Well Wigan](#) website for lifestyle advice, and where necessary, refer them to the [We Are With You](#) drug and alcohol charity.

"Being based in Robin Park means we can even show them around the leisure facilities and gym!"

One patient said: "The liver blood test was something that I wasn't aware about and if you can catch any disorder early that's good and can be treated."

Future plans

The pilot runs until the end of December and final results are expected next spring. So far, the team have referred 88 people to the HCC pathway.

The team is following up with those people who have yet to respond and if the pilot was to continue they plan to look at other ways of reaching those at risk.

They would love to keep hold of the scanner for a longer period of time, if possible, and can see the potential of extending assessments in the wider community.

Mike added: "It's a hand held scanner, about the size of a laptop, so we could go into care homes and do home visits."

ENDS