

Successful public health campaigns

As part of the essential service designated “promotion of healthy lifestyles” in the community pharmacy contract in England and Wales, pharmacists must take part in at least six public health campaigns per year. Dawn Connelly finds out what is involved in running a successful campaign

Running a successful public health campaign requires a number of key components, including adequate planning, creative campaign materials and the involvement of all pharmacy staff.

Lambeth and Southwark primary care trusts in London have joined forces on several public health campaigns over the past year. Ros Band, health development manager at Health First, a specialist NHS health promotion service for Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, has been working with the PCTs to develop the campaigns, evaluate learning to date and create a strategy for the next programme.

Planning for the next programme of campaigns, which will start in April, is now under way. “We have a long shortlist, which we are running past partners in public health and front-line primary care service managers to see what they think the top six campaigns should be,” she says. Each campaign runs for one month.

Health First organises pre-campaign briefing sessions for pharmacy staff to explain the campaign’s aims and objectives and provide background information. For pharmacists, these sessions follow the regular community pharmacy forum and include tips on how to run a successful campaign. Additional sessions for pharmacy counter staff focus on issues such as how to target patients.

“It has really been a partnership between Health First, the PCT pharmacy contract implementation managers and the community pharmacists themselves to make the campaigns happen,” says Ms Band.

Basic campaigns involve leaflets, posters and signposting to other services. More ex-



Diabetes campaign poster

tensive campaigns can include additional activities, such as healthy eating workshops and patient questionnaires.

Ash Soni, a community pharmacist in Streatham, London, and the community pharmacist representative on the Lambeth PCT health promotion subgroup, has been involved in several public health campaigns this year.

A recent diabetes campaign in the borough aimed to identify people with undiagnosed diabetes and refer them to their GP. “It is important to know what you are trying to achieve and make sure that the campaign material reflects this,” says Mr Soni. They tested the diabetes campaign material on a user group identified through Diabetes UK, he says.

The campaign involved pharmacy staff filling in a questionnaire with patients while they waited for their prescriptions; a positive response to any of the questions triggered a GP referral. The questionnaire was designed in association with the PCT public health director and medical director, and associated diabetologists, so as to avoid inappropriate referrals. Campaign material was sent to community pharmacies two weeks before the campaign was due to start.

The campaign was monitored and evaluated to see how it could be improved. “We found that the campaign was good for identifying undiagnosed diabetes but it also revealed that existing diabetes patients wanted more information. Next year we will target both groups of patients,” says Mr Soni.

A training event was held by the PCT for pharmacists and pharmacy counter staff before the campaign. Frances Wellburn, community pharmacy contracts and development manager at Lambeth PCT, says that next year the PCT hopes to incorporate screening into both the diabetes and hypertension cam-

aigns. “This will probably not be in all pharmacies but will be concentrated in hotspots identified through this year’s campaigns,” she explains.

Mr Soni believes the most important thing in any campaign is to be proactive. “One of the things about doing health promotion is talking to your patients — either you or your staff,” he argues. He says that it is important to upskill pharmacy staff so they can approach customers with confidence. “Give them the responsibility because you cannot possibly speak to every patient that walks through the door,” he says.

Bhadresh Patel, a community pharmacist in Herne Hill, London, agrees. “The key to the success of any health promotion campaign is involving all of the pharmacy staff,” he says. “I always stress to my staff that it is compulsory to participate in all campaigns as part of the new contract. The staff need to know that, embrace it and be proactive.” Having a dedicated area within the pharmacy where health promotion material can be displayed has helped to attract people into the pharmacy, he adds.

Mr Patel also believes that monitoring and evaluating campaigns is an important part of the process. For each campaign, he records how many leaflets are issued, what advice is given in response to a question, what advice is offered without a question, and how many customers are referred to another person or organisation.

“This enables us to evaluate the campaign and discuss it as a team. We look at what worked well, what did not work well and how it can be improved next time.” These data are also fed back to the PCT to inform future campaigns.

Successful campaign tips for primary care organisations

- Have clear campaign aims and objectives
- Align the campaign to local and national health priorities and inequalities
- Think about what other local initiatives could be involved to enrich the campaign
- Communicate the campaign to other primary care providers, such as GPs
- Hold pre-campaign briefings with community pharmacists
- Support pharmacy staff with appropriate materials and skills development
- Tailor campaign resources and strategy to the target population
- Communicate successes to encourage others to participate in future campaigns
- Evaluate and learn from the campaign to inform future programmes

Successful campaign tips for community pharmacists

- Be proactive
- Engage pharmacy staff at all levels
- Attend pre-campaign briefings
- Have a dedicated area or board to display campaign material within the pharmacy
- Be creative with displays by using props, such as plastic fruit and vegetables or condoms when appropriate
- Make sure campaign posters stand out, for example, put them at an angle, or even upside down
- Train counter staff and give them responsibility for campaign tasks
- Back up oral advice with written information
- Signpost customers to appropriate agencies
- Record and evaluate the campaign and discuss the outcomes with the pharmacy team