

“Ironman” pharmacist keeps Wales moving with “lifestyle” prescriptions

Following the success of a pilot lifestyle clinic run by a community pharmacist in West Wales, plans are under way for similar programmes to be rolled out on a larger scale. Hannah Pike investigates

Jon David, proprietor of Neyland Pharmacy in Pembrokeshire, has always been interested in sports and fitness. It was during training for representing Great Britain in the annual “Ironman” triathlon, which consists of a 2.5 mile swim, 112 mile bike ride and a 26 mile run, that he had the idea of introducing “exercise prescriptions” to his pharmacy.

During sports performance testing at a leisure centre, Mr David was given a prescription for his own training, with details such as what speed to run on the treadmill and at what rate to cycle. “I wondered why there shouldn’t just be a basic lifestyle prescription for some of my customers who may be at risk of developing coronary heart disease” he told *The Journal*. “Such a prescription would incorporate smoking cessation, dietary advice, a look at how much alcohol was being consumed and advice about which type of exercise to do.”

Lifestyle clinics

A few months later Mr David was running a pilot “healthy lifestyle” clinic in his pharmacy aimed at customers who would not normally visit their GP, yet might be at risk of developing coronary heart disease in the future. Mr David ran the pilot for a year, performing health checks on 40 people who were referred to his clinic from the local GP surgery, or were recruited by a poster advertising the service in the window of the shop.

The lifestyle check included blood lipid and glucose profiles, blood pressure testing, height and weight, smoking, diet, alcohol consumption and level of physical activity. Mr David used a computer programme that has been validated to calculate the customer’s relative risk of heart attack, to illustrate visually how small lifestyle changes could reduce the patient’s risk, and to help patients see where positive changes could be made. He advised customers on how physical activity could be incorporated into their daily lives. Patients had follow-up assessments three months and six months after the initial consultation. On average, significant health benefits with regard to cholesterol levels and weight loss were achieved for patients within three months.

“It’s really about empowering people with a little bit of knowledge so they can improve their lifestyle,” he explained, “For example, with small changes in exercise and diet, and a reduction in smoking, the overall effects are huge. If a customer had a lift from their house every day, I would suggest they got picked up



Jon David: empower patients with the knowledge to change their lifestyle

a 10-minute walk down the road, and ate an apple on the way. Just a few little changes and a bit of advice and encouragement made real differences to a lot of people.”

Mr David’s pilot showed that this model of lifestyle could be adopted in any community pharmacy.

Project expansion

Publication of his results, with the help of Sarah Hiom, All Wales specialist pharmacist for research and development, provided a platform for the Pembrokeshire Pharmacy Forum to apply to the local health board for funding as part of an “inequalities in health” project to target coronary heart disease. Funding has now been secured and lifestyle clinics similar to the one piloted by Mr David are expected to be rolled out in eight community pharmacies in Pembrokeshire over the next few months.

Pharmacists will get paid up to £600 per year for running the clinics and meeting screening targets. Chris Martin, chairman of Pembrokeshire LHB told *The Journal*: “By receiving funding as part of this project community pharmacy has been recognised as being a full member of the primary health care team and having a huge contribution to make to public health as a whole.”

Mr David’s next project was to design a series of lifestyle clinics in Carmarthenshire, together with John Llewelyn, proprietor of Brynamman pharmacy, that would run in conjunction with social and leisure service departments at the local council. The scheme, which is still in a planning stage and expected to start this autumn, will involve local community pharmacies carrying out a coronary heart disease risk factor assessment and then, with the patient’s consent, supplying these details to trained staff at the local leisure cen-

tre. The leisure centre staff will then create an “exercise prescription” for each patient, depending on their specific needs. This system of exercise referral is already being used by GPs in the county, but this will be the first time that community pharmacists will be supplying the data. Arrangements are in place for funding to come from Carmarthenshire County Council, and it is hoped that funding from the local health board will also be secured.

Mr David believes that there is the potential for an important relationship to develop between local councils and community pharmacies, and that this should be further explored. “Patient testing is undoubtedly an important role for community pharmacy,” he said, “but barriers need to be broken down between GPs, sports centres, local councils and pharmacies.”

In addition to schemes involving the use of local leisure facilities, Mr David says that pharmacists are in an ideal position to help the council with dissemination of more general information. “With the demise of post offices, to whom does the Government look to provide information to the community about housing or heating, for example? The obvious answer is community pharmacy. Pharmacists are likely to have contact with elderly people who may live on their own and who may not be getting regular meals or have good heating, for example. Social welfare does have an effect on health care.”

While plans are under way for these larger-scale projects to be rolled out, Mr David still provides free lifestyle checks on an ad hoc basis. On average he will take one blood pressure reading per day, perform four blood glucose tests per week and one cholesterol test per week. He is constantly giving out advice about healthy living.

“Healthy living” is also part of the national curriculum at the local primary school, Neyland Junior School. Every year Mr David visits the school to help the children learn about health issues. He encourages an art competition for which children design posters about staying healthy. Mr David’s pharmacy staff help judge the posters, which are displayed in the pharmacy. “I hope children will pass on the key messages to their parents,” Mr David said.

Mr David insists that what he is doing is just common sense. He hopes that by raising awareness of coronary heart disease risk factors among his local population, he will be able to help customers help themselves before they become a burden to the NHS.