

New Social Prescribing project in North and West Oxfordshire

Two Oxfordshire Citizens Advice offices are partnering to launch a new “Social Prescribing” service across Cherwell and West Oxfordshire.

Citizens Advice North Oxon & South Northants (CANOSN) and Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire (CAWO) have funding from the Department of Health “health & Wellbeing Fund, with additional funding from Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver this exciting 4-year project.

Social Prescribing is a mechanism for linking primary care patients with non-medical sources of support within their community. Social Prescribing attempts to address the social causes of ill health. Recent years have seen a growth in the number of Social Prescribing schemes being set up in the UK.

Citizens Advice evidence shows that addressing social problems reduces unnecessary use of GP time. Our research shows 19% of GP time is spent on non-clinical problems, costing the health service almost £400 million a year. Patient concerns about employment, housing, access to welfare benefits and relationship issues reduce the amount of treatment time for medical issues.

The level of non-health demand has increased in the last year: around three-quarters (73%) of GPs report that the proportion of time they spend dealing with non-health issues as part of consultations has increased over the past year.

Social Prescribing is a way in which people living with long term conditions can get access to a variety of support services they need. Issues like help with getting a job, housing, debt management and social contact. Help with these things is often available through local authorities, charities and local community organisations, but few patients or GP staff know about the full range of support available.

Social Prescribing means that the individual can build their support links by working with a Community Navigator who does know, or who has expertise in finding out, what is available. Following a referral from the GP, together with the Community Navigator, the individual can discuss their problems and identify the support that they need to manage their own health more effectively and meet their own personal goals.

Pat Coomber-Wood, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice North Oxon & South Northants, said:

“We are very excited to be part of developing new services across Cherwell and West Oxfordshire. We have delivered advice in Health centres for many years. This service gives us an opportunity to reduce social isolation and physical inactivity by supporting people to think about their needs in a different way and helping them access and engage in their local communities”

The project started in October 2018.