

# Making life better for patients in Suffolk

A partnership project between care homes and GP practices in east Suffolk is delivering better care for patients. The GP care home alignment project, which is funded by the NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, sees care and nursing homes aligned to a local GP practice, with GPs undertaking regular visits to check on the health of residents. The GPs also carry out early dementia testing and give general health advice including falls prevention, which can have serious consequences for older people.

Michala Hartley-Brown (pictured), who manages Sanctuary Supported Living's (SSL) Sidegate Lane Nursing Home in Ipswich, which cares for those with various mental health needs, has spoken of how the project is improving the health and wellbeing of residents and reducing the need for hospital admissions. She said: "We have up to 24 residents in our nursing home, all of whom are accommodated in a warm and caring environment and looked after by my team of dedicated staff.

"Before this project started last year, our residents were treated by GPs from up to nine practices, depending on where the resident lived prior to moving in to our home. With different GPs visiting every week, it was difficult for our residents to receive a continuity of care that was appropriate for their needs.

"Now, every week, one of two GPs from the Derby Road Practice visit the home. Knowing which GP will be visiting gives our residents much more confidence and they appreciate the familiarity of having a GP they know come to visit. It's also undoubtedly helpful for the GPs too, because they know more about the patient and their medical history, are able to spend time with them, listen more and offer the best form of treatment.

"Our nursing home looks after



■ Michala Hartley-Brown  
Picture: CONTRIBUTED

patients aged 55 and over who have a mental health condition, such as dementia, a personality disorder or schizophrenia. Sometimes, these patients need admission to hospital, and we've seen a significant reduction in the number of our residents who require this.

"For example, if a resident had a respiratory condition, previously they would usually have had to have a hospital stay. Now, in many cases, a GP will come to the home and take care of their patient's needs. The GP will administer the right treatment here in the nursing home. For someone with a mental health issue, going to hospital can be extremely traumatic, so avoiding the need for a trip to hospital saves stress and anxiety for the resident, as well as reducing the pressure on our already overstretched hospitals.

"Being aligned to one GP practice has also meant that our resident's end of life care wishes are being better met. For many of our residents, when they reach the end of their life, they would prefer to die in the familiarity of their nursing



■ Patients in Suffolk are benefitting from new services.

home surroundings, rather than in a hospital. The level of care delivered by the Derby Road Practice GPs means that in many cases they can administer the care and treatment needed here, until the patient reaches the end of their life.

"This NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group project has made a really positive difference to the lives of our residents."

Meanwhile, in west Suffolk, the

introduction of a new community-based chronic pain management service in west Suffolk is set to deliver better care and support to patients.

The service, which will begin in April 2015, is being funded by the NHS West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (WSCCG) and delivered by the local Suffolk GP Federation.

Chronic pain is a persistent pain which lasts longer than three months and could arise from an injury or illness or there can be no clear cause. It is estimated that in the UK five million people develop chronic pain each year and only two-thirds recover.

Dr Rakesh Raja, (right) a GP in Sudbury who is leading the introduction of the new service for the WSCCG, said: "The introduction of this community-based service recognises that there is a need for additional help and support for patients. Chronic pain can have devastating consequences, leaving a patient unable to function normally.

"This is very much an integrated service, meaning our health and care partners along with voluntary organisations will be working with

Picture: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



patients, depending on the type of help and support they need. This could be accessing healthy living services to increase activity or cut down on smoking or drinking."

Some patients may benefit from physiotherapy treatment or access to mental health or occupational health services. Patients will be referred to the service by their GP, physiotherapist or hospital.

Dr Crispin Dunne, Suffolk GP Federation Board director and a GP in Bury St Edmunds, said: "The GP Federation being chosen as the provider is a testament to the confidence the WSCCG has in the ability of our members to deliver a quality service. Being a local, GP-led, community organisation, we know just how much distress can be caused by chronic pain."

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