Improvement work

Lorraine Thom, Lead Diabetes Specialist Community Nurse, South Gloucestershire, talks to Suraiya Chowdhury, Leadership Programme Manager, Diabetes UK, about her work on several improvement projects

As a community DSN, Lorraine’s role can be varied. A Diabetes UK Tomorrow’s Leader, she’s learnt a lot from the implementation of the improvement projects she’s been involved in – starting with her locality successfully securing transformation funding to improve achievement of treatment targets. As part of this, group consultations were set up for peer learning, attended by consultants from the hospital, diabetes specialist nurses (DSNs), commissioning group pharmacists and members of the primary care team.

Using their IT system to create a thematic search, the consultation group focused on complex patients within a common theme. This has led to the community team collaborating with hospitals more effectively, and has had a really positive impact on improving knowledge and skills. Lorraine has also been working to improve the uptake of diabetes education courses in her area. Simple tweaks, such as using an opt in method, as opposed to opt out, helped restore patient choice and reduced Did Not Attend rates. Highlighting the peer support element as a benefit of the programme also helped drive attendance. Thinking creatively about who else could support them in their attempts to increase uptake, Lorraine involved the Local Medical Committee which – in turn – engaged with practice nurses across the locality, leading to the programme being promoted to patients in a number of ways.

Given the challenges in recruitment and training across the country, Lorraine and her team are currently working on a pilot project to recruit an assistant practitioner. They’re hoping to tap into the knowledge and resources within their team and neighbouring trust to train the assistant practitioner, and improve access to support and advice. Similarly, they’re hoping to recruit support workers to improve the care for housebound patients. This group of people was highlighted as significantly difficult to reach, often missing out on receiving annual checks and being at high risk of malnutrition and foot problems, as well as frequently presenting with several comorbidities. By training a support worker within each GP cluster to do blood tests, check feet and carry out a basic annual review, the team hopes to reach out to more of this community. The support workers are then able to escalate to GPs or DSNs, as and when necessary.

Lessons learnt
Lorraine shared her top three lessons from her improvement project experience:
1. Think it through properly.
2. Discuss with others in the team and beyond, as they may be able to identify flaws and enrich your plans.
3. Just go for it. You’re never going to have any more time, any more staff or more resources than you do now. But if you really want to do something – just do it.

National Diabetes in Pregnancy Conference 2019

This year, Diabetes UK’s National Diabetes in Pregnancy Conference takes place on 21 November 2019 at Ashton Gate Stadium, Bristol BS3 2EJ.

More details to follow