New talking therapies service announced for Northumberland

Wednesday 1 July, 2015

A new psychological therapies service is set to benefit thousands of patients across Northumberland, following a listening exercise led by the NHS locally.

The new service, which has been developed by NHS Northumberland CCG, was shaped by patients and clinicians together, building on comments and ideas put forward by service users.

The service will be delivered from 1 September 2015 by a partnership of three organisations – North East-based charity Mental Health Matters, Efficacy, a cognitive behaviour therapy service, and the Sunderland Counselling Service charity.

Dr Eileen Higgins, a GP in Guidepost and GP lead for mental health at NHS Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), said: "Over 200 patients have played a part in shaping the new service, which is very much built around people's needs.

"The county has benefited from good psychological therapies services over the past five years, but a new contract is always a chance to listen to patients and see where we can make improvements.

"People were keen to see a more personal service, with a single phone number, the option to self-refer and a simple transition if they need to move from one type of therapy to another.

"Flexibility was another key theme, as people don't want to feel pressured to progress to a timescale.

"The service will do more outreach work, encouraging people get help early if they need it. There will also be more 'social prescribing', helping patients beat isolation by getting involved in social activities or volunteering."

Patients will still be able to self-refer into the service and will also have the option to choose a convenient venue for their treatment. Referrals can also be made through a GP, carer or healthcare professional.

Service users will have access to the service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by telephone, and will be able to refer themselves back to the service at a later stage if they need to.

The three organisations delivering the service will operate as one under the brand 'Talking Matters Northumberland', to ensure a seamless approach if people need a change in their therapy.

Andy Cox, Director of Business at Mental Health Matters, said: "Our aim is to ensure people in Northumberland can get quick and easy access to services which enable them to live their lives with improved mental health."

The current service will continue to operate until September. Northumberland CCG is committed to ensuring that existing patients do not experience any disruption in their care, and will contact them in due course with information about the new arrangements.

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Scan Me:

Company Contact:

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MHM

T. 01915163500
E. mediaenquiries@mhm.org.uk
W. https://www.mhm.org.uk

Additional Contact(s):
Carmel Smith
Email: mediaenquiries@mhm.org.uk
Tel: 07816 083 004

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