

Retail Relationships

Kapoor Healthy Living Pharmacies, Greater Manchester

Introduction

The local pharmacy is an essential part of every community; it's estimated that 438m health-related visits to English chemists are made every year. Staff often develop long-term bonds with customers and their families, making pharmacies well-placed to understand and identify local needs – this is particularly pertinent in areas of deprivation, where GP provision is lacking.

Yet pharmacies are an under-utilised resource; staff skills and knowledge are often overlooked by sector colleagues and the general public. Pharmacies have real potential to play a far greater role in boosting health outcomes than they currently do.

So what can be done to harness this potential? How can pharmacies use their expertise and meaningful relationships with customers to improve the health of entire communities?

Origins of the project

Kapoor's Pharmacy Services has three outlets across Greater Manchester, each in an area with a particular social, economic and health profile. Owner Maneet Kapoor observed the importance of wellbeing to his customers and recognised the powerful role that pharmacies could play in communities' health. He saw that he could build upon their accessibility, their status as a trusted first point-of-contact, and the importance of early action in preventing health crises.

In 2012 Kapoor chose to move away from the traditional pharmacy delivery model to become an early adopter of the new Healthy Living Pharmacy approach. The model was developed in 2009 by NHS Portsmouth and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Local Pharmaceutical Committee in an attempt to illustrate how pharmacies could become more effective in engaging the general public in improving their own health.

The HLP strategy is based on principles of preventative care and the trusted, personalised service offered by many local pharmacies. An HLP helps customers make better decisions about their own health, by providing an enhanced range of services which are tailored to the specific needs of the community. This commercial model was developed in Portsmouth and is now being taken up nationally in a market-led, state-enabled approach.

Partnership working

HLPs forge critical partnerships with their communities, third sector organisations and public sector bodies. The result is a collaborative network which can both promote initiatives and signpost customers.

Approach and delivery

Customers entering Kapoor HLP pharmacies encounter busy, vibrant and welcoming environments. They are addressed by first name, and exchange small talk with the staff. A 'Health Promotion Zone' showcases the latest monthly health campaign, while the walls display details of local groups and useful numbers.

HLP staff are actively encouraged to initiate conversations with customers about the current campaign – for instance discussing the effects of smoking with a view to quitting. Key to this is an encouraging, enabling manner, rather than a prescriptive, top-down attitude.

Central to the HLP model are Healthy Living Champions who advise customers on everything from flu to sexual health. Champions promote an ethos of self-help and self-management, where customers are empowered to take charge of their own health.

Kapoor Pharmacies has an HLC in each of its three stores. There is no financial incentive: these admirable volunteers play a pivotal role in engaging residents and customers. Champions regularly seek the views and suggestions of customers. HLCs bring back vital information to the pharmacy about what is happening in the neighbourhood. They also work with community groups, for instance checking blood pressure at the Indian Senior Citizens Centre in Whalley Range.

This philosophy of engagement and sharing between pharmacies, staff and with other health care professionals in promoting health and the value of self-care underpins the HLP approach.

Success and outcomes

In Portsmouth – which faces similar poverty, crime and deprivation challenges as Manchester – the HLP model has seen considerable and significant success. Twelve pharmacies were selected to trial the approach, concluding that even small changes can have a positive impact on health.

In just one year, HLPs there increased the number of smokers quitting by 140% (a vital step in narrowing health inequalities in deprived areas), and 81% of participants in a healthy weight programme achieved a 5% weight loss.

Maneet Kapoor believes his Greater Manchester pharmacies have become more responsive and focussed as a result of adopting the HLP method. Pharmacists are now better placed to spot emerging issues such as the first signs of neglect or under-nourishment.

Kapoor highlights mental health as a particular area of improvement: “I was [previously] unaware of the issues involved and the poor access those with mental health problems can have to services...Customers don't always want medicine or a referral to a GP. Sometimes they need...to go for a brew and a walk, take regular exercise or break up their routine with some company. So we have helped set up that kind of group and now we can point them to it. We have seen lives changed, just by giving someone a leaflet.”

Kapoor's business has grown and consultations have increased. The number of new customers enrolled on programmes such as smoking cessation has been steadily growing.

Future plans and obstacles

While HLPs represent a sustainable commercial proposition, the commissioning framework is tied to the broader national framework and thus could be patchy and fragmented going forwards. HLPs also still need to overcome a lack of public awareness of what pharmacists can provide in comparison with GPs.

Conclusion

Healthy Living Pharmacies such as those operated by Kapoor across Greater Manchester enable customers to make better decisions and manage their health in the long-term. They are an effective way to empower people to take action on their own health themselves – aided by, but not driven by, someone else. HLPs are a crucial first step in ensuring that pharmacies are doing as much as possible to advance local communities.

Pharmacists are often the first port of call in the health treatment chain and they require no appointment and little waiting time. It's clear that these resources could and should be used far more than they currently are, acting as a significant filter for both doctors' surgeries and accident and emergency departments.

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