YOUR MEDICINES, YOUR HEALTH

How Cwm Taf University Health Board implemented a public education initiative to improve awareness of the benefits of using, storing and disposing of medicines safely and effectively

BACKGROUND

The World Health Organisation believes that up to 40% of prescription medicines do not get used as intended. Cwm Taf University Health Board in the heart of the South Wales Valleys found that traditional financial waste campaigns were having little or no impact with the local population who saw millions of pounds wasted on medicines as poor NHS management and not something they could influence.

It was evident that the public were keen to know how and why they should use, store and dispose of their medicines efficiently, effectively and safely.

Often people don't know how and where to dispose out of date and unneeded medicines and either leave them stockpiled in the cupboard or dispose of them down the toilet with consequential environmental damage.

DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVE

We needed to focus on the reasons why medicines were not being used and give the public simple, easy advice and actions that they could take to correct that.

In 2014 Your Medicines, Your Health (YMYH), a public education campaign was launched, initially targeting those aged 50+ who were multiple medicines users.

OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVE

YMYH uses behavioural science to inform a structured range of interventions. The purpose of these is to increase the responsible use of medicines by patients and the public. In doing this, YMYH promotes self-care, self-reliance and independence.

Key objectives include:
- Improve medicines compliance / adherence
- Improve communication and encourage co-production
- Reduce medicines waste
- Improve patient outcomes

YMYH seeks to target using, storing and disposal of medicines through specific focused initiatives. These include:
- Spring Clean Your Medicines Cupboard
- Request a Medicines Use Review
- Remember to Bring Medicines into Hospital.

15 people a week die in the UK as a result of accidental prescription overdose, many of these are children who think they are eating sweets.
Guidance was sought from the Behavioural Insights Team on using behavioural science to influence change. Meetings were held with sensory awareness teams supporting the visually and hearing impaired, mental health services, primary, secondary and community teams.

Promotional material was developed using bright sunny, positive yellow with text in black or red as these are easiest to read. Using the principles of reciprocation, we give away pens, stress balls, reminder post its, bags for returning medicines for disposal and bags for bringing them into hospital.

We have involved over 30,000 members of the public in promotional events, run targeted mail drops and evaluated the response rates. We have also developed a web site, used in house TVs to screen daily medicines management messages, social media including Facebook and Twitter, local radio and community magazines.

In 2015-16, we led a project with the local education service and creative artists to develop a teaching pack for primary school pupils using creative practice to learn about safe and effective use of medicines. This has enabled us to then focus on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as well as cross generation and community wide communication of our campaign messages. The artwork is displayed widely and our vehicles have both the YMYH logo and message ‘Take them if you can, Tell us if you can’t’ and vinyl wrapped school artwork promoting safe medicines use.

Benefits

Over 10% of the population have now attended a YMYH promotional event. For the last three years, 500 each year have been surveyed and over 90% now say that they have learnt something about medicines use and will act on the information given.

When the Spring Clean Your Medicines Cupboard initiative is run on a focus area, over 30% of bags are returned with a 35% increase in returned unneeded medicines. When questioned, the public advised that once they have cleared out their cupboards they are much more likely to stop over ordering and build up stocks again.

To date over 30,000 people have attended a YMYH promotional event and pupils from 15 primary schools have participated in the lessons with the roll out to all 150 primary schools to take place in 2018 delivered by the School Nurse Team with Community Artists and local teachers.

Teachers and Health Promotion Leads say the teaching pack is providing essential learning about safe use of medicines, supporting the wellbeing of future generations and helping reduce the risk of accidental overdose.

The campaign has the support of Community Pharmacy Wales, Public Health Wales, The Wales Audit Office, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries, Local Authorities and Third Sector organisations.

Student feedback

“It made me feel important.”

“I liked helping older people with medicines messages.”

“I learnt not to keep medicine in your draws!!”

“I learnt a lot about medicine.”
**Patient case studies**

Patient 1: After attending a YMYH event, patient 1 self-referred to their Community Pharmacy for an MUR and reduced their inhaler use from 4 to 1.

Patient 2: After attending a YMYH event, patient 2 asked their GP to review their prescription and no longer has anti-histamines after 14 years of taking them.

Patient 3: Patient 3 is now actively seeking help to reduce anti-depressant dependency.

Patients 4 & 5: One local couple brought back the contents of their medicines cupboard and reduced their levels of prescription medicines use by over half.

**Future work**

This campaign is ongoing. The project was used as a case study for a PhD on evaluating creative practice and health, which has led to the development of a toolkit for evaluating similar projects. You can find out more about the outputs from the doctorate in the ArtsWorks Case Studies by contacting [YMYH@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:YMYH@wales.nhs.uk). The prototype of the toolkit is being finalised by Cardiff Metropolitan University and Public Health Wales, and will be available to trial soon.

The project team provides regular feedback and user comments from patients to prescribers, dispensers and industry leads.

The School Nurse Team will be rolling out the teaching pack in the new year and the Chief Pharmacist for Wales is actively seeking to have this incorporated into the national curriculum.

**For further information**

If you would like to hear more about the Your Medicines Your Health initiative, or ask a query relating to this case study, please contact Alison Warner or the Your Medicines Your Health team.