

Title

Green social prescribing - a survey of pharmacists' awareness and engagement

Keywords

green prescribing; social prescribing; pharmacists; green spaces

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Background

Green prescribing involves prescribing nature-based health interventions to patients with a defined need¹. Nature-based interventions have been shown to benefit health and wellbeing through improving physical activity, and mentally-restorative effects² and are considered a cost-effective, low-risk, preventative therapeutic option³. The limited research on UK green prescribing has primarily focussed on the role of general practitioners¹. However, pharmacists in addition to being experts in medicines and providing advice on prescribed medication, play a wider role in the health team, focussed on person-centred care. As such they are also well-placed to advise patients and support colleagues regarding non-pharmacological prescribing options such as green social prescribing⁴.

The aim of this study was to explore awareness of green social prescribing amongst pharmacists working in Wales, UK and to identify green prescribing initiatives with which they are involved. The data will provide context for a wider project focussed on experiences of green prescribing pathways linked to a community site in South Wales.

Methods

A short anonymous online survey was developed for completion by a convenience sample of pharmacists working in Wales (approximately 4000 registered pharmacists⁵). Following university ethics committee approval, the information sheet and survey links were promoted via an online blog on the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Wales website⁶, and circulated via research team contacts and social media (e.g. email, Twitter). The survey, a mix of tick-box and free-format responses, was hosted on JISC Online Surveys and was available from September to December 2021. Resulting data were analysed descriptively and using content analysis.

Results

By close of the survey, 31 completed responses had been received, the majority from hospital / secondary care (n=17), community (n=6) and cluster (n=3) pharmacists. A third (n=10) had previously heard of the term 'green prescribing' but understanding of the term varied, with 9 respondents linking it to prescribing nature / green space activities, and the same number linking to more sustainable / environmentally friendly prescribing approaches (reduction in plastic waste, non-CFC inhalers, etc.). Alternative terms respondents had heard used included social prescribing (n=10), nature prescribing (n=3), ecopsychology (n=1), green care (n=1) and wellbeing prescribing (n=1); 9 respondents did not answer and 9 had not heard of other terms. Seven respondents were aware of local green social prescribing initiatives but only 3 were actually involved in them.

Implications

Although small in scale and potentially limited by responder bias, this study's findings nevertheless provide useful information about pharmacists' understanding of, and engagement with, green social prescribing. Although it might be anticipated that respondents would be those already interested in, and engaged with, the topic, very few were involved in green prescribing initiatives, as found in a survey investigating pharmacists' engagement with wider social prescribing⁴. Importantly, it was clear that there is confusion over terminology and the meaning of the term 'green prescribing'. This is consistent with the literature and is a significant barrier for the promotion of nature-based interventions³. Pharmacy research on 'green prescribing' tends to relate to environmentally friendly approaches to prescribing rather than green social prescribing. Although awareness needs to be raised to enable pharmacists to engage with and support green social prescribing initiatives, this fundamental issue of universally understood terminology must first be addressed.

The data from this study are being fed into larger project which will measure the impact of green prescribing pathways within a community setting. In addition to general practitioners, social care and education providers, it is hoped that more pharmacists will join those currently signposting individuals to opportunities to reap the potential benefits of engagement with green spaces.

References

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