

Integrating / Embedding Welfare Rights Advice in General Practice

Key facts (April 2018)

'I cannot address medical issues as I have to deal with the patient's agenda first, which is getting money to feed her family and heat her home.' GP

- Crucially, developing and implementing the service requires ongoing close collaboration between health improvement/public health, advice service and general practice
- Embedding a welfare rights advisor in general practice reduces pressure on GPs and primary care services; improves productivity of advice services and improves patient's health and well-being
- The advisor provides advice and assistance on all aspects of income maximisation, employability support, debt resolution and housing problems, as well as providing representation at tribunals where appropriate. The advisor links patients into other sources of support as appropriate.
- From a policy context, the approach contributes to reducing child poverty, health & social care integration, maximising income and tackling health inequalities
- It gives general practices no extra work; it benefits patients and allows GPs and other members of the practice team to focus on clinical care and treatment for patients whilst the advisor can support them to address their social and economic needs
- It supports practices to provide a person-centred approach by offering an integrated service that supports patients in a non-stigmatising setting which they trust and where their specific health needs are understood
- The advisor uses a casework approach so the patient sees the same adviser throughout the entire process providing continuity and ongoing support in order to get the best outcome
- Advisors require access to medical records (with appropriate consent) to produce reports to support benefit applications; these are discussed with GPs to ensure accuracy. Supporting benefit applications with accurate medical reports reduces the number of mandatory reconsiderations and appeals
- The advisor is based in the practice approximately one session a week. They attend the practice and locality meetings as and when appropriate to share learning
- Advisors are employed and managed by the third sector or local authority advice services accredited under the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers, registered with, and regulated by, the Financial Conduct Authority and covered by professional indemnity insurance.
- Service commissioners should take account of the *Framework for Public Funding of Advice* http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/money_advice/Framework-for-Public-Funding-of-Advice.pdf

Kate Burton, ScotPHN Public Health Practitioner, email: kate.burton@nhslthian.scot.nhs.uk Tel: 0131 537 9290 or 07970744519