

Celebrating the world's first social prescribing day

With one in four GP consultations arranged purely for social reasons,¹ the medical model falls short of delivering the excellent care that our patients need and that healthcare professionals strive to deliver. Social prescribing (SP) is not an argument against the importance of clinical interventions — it has been developed to complement and work alongside the medical model, to address unmet needs. Moreover, it has the potential to play a key role in tackling the social determinants of health, estimated to account for approximately 80% of the modifiable factors contributing to health outcomes for a population.²

With personalised care highlighted as a top priority within the recently published *NHS Long Term Plan*,³ 2019 truly is the year of SP. With the addition of 1000 trained link-workers, the NHS has promised to extend the benefits to over 2.5 million patients within the next 5 years.³

UNITED WITH A COMMON VISION

In spite of these recent encouraging policy changes, a critical challenge still remains. How do we foster an attitudinal change to shift the power to the people and local communities? How do we prevent lack of engagement? How do we forge cross-sectoral collaboration, and how do we ensure SP continues to grow as a grassroots movement? Working in partnership with patients is crucial, even more so in an era where information is readily available on the internet. The world's first SP Day (held on 14 March 2019) was designed to unite key stakeholders with a common vision in order to address some of the aforementioned challenges. Official plans were launched in 2018 through a speech at the King's Fund 'Social Prescribing Coming of Age' annual event — a gift from the NHS England National Social Prescribing Student Champion Scheme⁴ and its collaborators on the NHS's 70th birthday.

Armed with several role models, mentors, and collaborating organisations, hundreds of national and international students started reaching out to their local communities. The months leading up to the day have served as an opportunity to break down the barriers between local communities and the healthcare sector.

No single word could encompass the myriad of events and activities that took place in every single corner of the UK and beyond its borders on 14 March 2019. Among several other national events, the University of Westminster and Arts 4 Dementia hosted a stakeholder round-table discussion to support patients with dementia, prevent loneliness, and preserve resilience in the community.

A KEY MILESTONE IN OUR JOURNEY

Internationally, SP was celebrated in 11 countries including Canada, Finland, the US, and Brazil. The Ontario Alliance for Healthier Communities in Canada hosted a 'Social Prescribing 101' webinar, while students in Brazil raised awareness through coffee stands in hospitals. Regional events in the UK took place, including the North East Regional Social Prescribing Conference, and 18 other student-led conferences and seminars.

However, it is the hundreds of events organised locally by voluntary organisations and community groups that inspired us the most. Be it through free entry for residents at the Brontë Museum exhibition in Yorkshire, a disco dancing group for older people in Northern Ireland, a community networking event in Wales, or a ukulele band in Oxenhope, West Yorkshire, the voices of those with lived experiences of SP echoed loud and clear.

By reaching a total of 29 million people through an excess of 11 000 social media posts and trending third in the UK on social media platforms, our campaign has achieved

its goal of spreading the word about SP and its benefits. The world's first SP day is a key milestone in our journey towards achieving person-centred care and a pause for thought for all of us, bringing clarity to how we will face the challenges ahead. SP has come a long way, and has much further to go, but one thing is certain: SP and personalised care are here to stay. Through a grassroots approach, we are committed to working with communities and patients to understand what truly matters to them.

Co-creating the future of health care, the SP movement acts as an elastic band, stretching and generating force over time, and resulting in long-lasting change.

Bogdan Chiva Giurca,

Foundation Doctor, Royal Surrey County Hospital, Guildford, Surrey.

Email: bc299@exeter.ac.uk

[@BogdanBCG](#)

Claudia Marta Santoni,

Medical Student, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

Acknowledgements

The Social Prescribing Network, the College of Medicine, NHS England, the Royal College of General Practitioners, The Conservation Volunteers, Elemental, Arts 4 Dementia, the Dunhill Medical Trust, Bromley by Bow Centre, the University of Westminster, and several others have been instrumental and key to the success of this campaign. Our thanks go to them and especially to the hundreds of voluntary care sector organisations, community groups, and patient leaders who took part throughout the day.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp19X706325>

REFERENCES

1. Caper K, Plunkett J. *A very general practice: how much time do GPs spend on issues other than health?* Citizens Advice, 2015. https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Public%20services%20publications/CitizensAdvice_AVeryGeneralPractice_May2015.pdf (accessed 16 Aug 2019).
2. Hood CM, Gennuso KP, Swain GR, Catlin BB. County health rankings: relationships between determinant factors and health outcomes. *Am J Prev Med* 2016; **50**(2): 129–135.
3. NHS. *The NHS long term plan*. 2019. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/> (accessed 16 Aug 2019).
4. Chiva Giurca B. Social prescribing student champion scheme: a novel peer-assisted-learning approach to teaching social prescribing and social determinants of health. *Educ Prim Care* 2018; **29**(5): 307–309.

"[Social prescribing] has the potential to play a key role in tackling the social determinants of health, estimated to account for approximately 80% of the modifiable factors contributing to health outcomes for a population."