

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

AND INTEGRATED HEALTH

Beyond Pills

a campaign to:

reduce unnecessary drug prescribing

expand social prescribing

benefit patients' health

support patient empowerment

save money

College of Medicine – June 2022

www.collegeofmedicine.org.uk

SUMMARY

The recent National Overprescribing Review* commissioned by the government estimated that **at least 10% of prescriptions for pharmaceutical drugs are unnecessary**. While they can do good, **drugs can also cause harm to patients**, affecting metabolism and quality of life. **Adverse drug reactions** – interactions with other drugs or side effects - account for 10-20% of hospital in-patient admissions, and may lead to premature death.

Tackling overprescribing could improve the health of millions, achieving benefits ‘comparable to a new blockbuster medicine’, according to the Review’s author, Dr Keith Ridge, NHS England Chief Pharmaceutical Officer.

The Review recommends social prescribing as a constructive addition or, in some cases, alternative to drugs. ‘Health is influenced by a range of social, economic and environmental factors. Often, medicines only deal with symptoms, and do not tackle the underlying causes of illness or effect a cure. Medicines are sometimes prescribed where the patient would benefit from other forms of advice and support to tackle or alleviate these underlying causes.’

Social prescribing usually involves the patient being referred to a link worker, a non-clinical professional who takes time with the patient to co-design a social intervention to address their specific issues. Interventions range widely from encouragement to exercise or improve nutrition, to join an arts group or start gardening to advice on welfare benefits, housing or occupational choices. Support is principally provided by voluntary community organisations.

Social prescribing is embedded in the NHS Long Term Plan and NHS England Personalised Care Programme, which empowers people to participate actively in their own health and care. Where implemented in mainly primary care, social prescribing has demonstrated proven benefits for patients, reduced work load and improved wellbeing for clinicians, reduced hospital admissions and achieved financial savings.

However, our concern is that **there are currently yawning gaps in the provision and awareness of social prescribing**, which means that **many patients are deprived of this potentially valuable non-medical treatment**.

The Beyond Pills campaign manifesto (*below*) lays out the problems and six specific actions that need to be taken to address these issues:

1. Medical and healthcare training needs to change
2. Financial incentives within the NHS need to change
3. The number of link workers needs to increase The voluntary sector needs more support
4. More systematic research needs to be carried out
5. Support must be directed to patient and community empowerment and involvement in healthcare.

The Government and NHS England have accepted the findings of the National Overprescribing Review. We call upon them now to take action.**

[*https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-overprescribing-review-report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-overprescribing-review-report)

[**https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-to-reduce-overprescribing-of-medicines](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-to-reduce-overprescribing-of-medicines)