



**Kathryn
Roberts
'Well-being
coordinator'**



So where else can I turn?

The job of a GP has changed a lot, but unlike in hospital where you chose a speciality very early, we in primary care, do remain GENERAL practitioners. I talked a bit last week about our GPs here, and shared how some of us have extra training, qualifications, or a special skill in a certain area, but we actually do remain 'generalists', covering everything from rashes, childhood development, complex heart disease, and primary care level mental health.

However, much of our role has had to expand to manage other non 'medical' issues, including the impact of unemployment, housing or financial worries, loneliness, supporting carers, to name but a few.

This is a huge area, and one which is now probably significantly greater with the impact of the pandemic. To that end, it has been important to increase the support and access to the sort of help that is essential to manage these problems, and adopt a bit of 'thinking outside the box'. That paved the way for a new role in primary care, that of the 'WELLBEING COORDINATOR'.

We, in Great Sutton Medical Centre, were lucky enough to have Kathryn Roberts join our team a few years ago and her role has increased exponentially over recent times, offering vital support ,and signposting people to appropriate help. So this week, I thought it was a great opportunity to introduce Kathryn to those of you unaware of the essential role she plays...

So Kathryn, you're quite a familiar face around Great Sutton Medical Centre

In a good way, I hope! I've been in my post here as Wellbeing Coordinator for 5 years now. In this time I've seen lots of great developments in the practice team but the highlight has been meeting so many of the patients. So I'm sure I do look familiar to lots of people.

Not all of our patients will know what a Wellbeing Coordinator does

It's quite a new role within the NHS and basically involves helping patients with any non-medical issues they have which may be affecting their health and wellbeing. This is often due to a change in circumstances and they are unsure of where to turn. For example, someone may be experiencing financial difficulty, they may have become a carer, they may be socially isolated, they may wish to adopt a healthier lifestyle, they may find they are needing some help to remain independent at home, they may have been bereaved. A whole range of things really, the list is almost endless.

My role comes under the general banner of 'social prescribing' which is about working with patients on the issues that matter most to them and finding solutions or

ways to cope. It may be referring onto other services or signposting onto community groups as well as working with people on ways in which they can help themselves.

I don't pretend to have all the answers but will always work with patients to find the best solution for them.

What type of onward referrals do you make?

Obviously all medical referrals continue to be done by a medical professional.

I refer people for benefits checks, help with debt, bereavement counselling, falls prevention, home energy checks, the exercise on prescription scheme, social care assessment, occupational therapy assessment, befriending to name but a few.

The main part of my role is about signposting. That is, telling people about services for them to contact themselves for help and support or putting them in touch with organisations such as Alzheimer's Society, MIND, exercise classes, Carers Trust, Turn2Us as well as self-help resources for medical conditions.

I can contact organisations on patient's behalf with their consent if they do not feel able to do so. For example, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about benefits or For Housing about social housing or to report repairs.

There's not a quick solution to some of the things you mention that patients may need help with is there?

No there isn't. As I said it's about working with patients and sometimes their families on what would help them most given their individual circumstances. It's recognising that each situation is different and requires an individual approach.

With some patients I may have one appointment but most, I will see over a period of months or longer.

My appointment times can be an hour or more so there's usually plenty of time to talk and offer support.

You must need to know about all the other services and activities that are available for you to signpost onto or refer to.

Yes and that's a moving feast as I'm sure all NHS staff are aware.

We're really fortunate here in Great Sutton as there are a lot of activities going on locally as well as having access to all the innovative things happening in Ellesmere Port like The Port Grocery. There are also very local, individual services such as lunch clubs, knitting classes as well as lots of services which cover the whole of West Cheshire like the Cheshire Change Hub.

Part of my role is about keeping as up to date as possible with what support services are available to our patients and how to access them.

So your role enables us at Great Sutton Medical Centre to meet the wider needs of our patients as well as their immediate health needs?

Yes definitely, that's the idea. It enables us to look at the person as a whole and meet as many of their needs as we can in order to optimise their health and wellbeing. It also enables us to use practice staff time effectively, for example allowing medical staff to concentrate on medical issues.

I think a key benefit of my role is that we as a practice can offer an individualised approach to our patients, considering a range of needs. In fact, patients may be referred for one issue but there are often others that I can also assist with or discuss.

How do people reading this get an appointment if they feel they would benefit from one?

The service is available to any patient aged 18 or over with a long term medical condition. Any of the practice staff can refer to me or patients can make an appointment in the usual way.

What do you like best about your role?

I really enjoy my job, including the variety and challenge of each day. Obviously the best bit is meeting and helping patients and their families and working with them to make positive change. It's great to see and hear about when we have been able to bring about an improvement for a patient in whatever they were seeking help with.

I enjoy being part of the fantastic team at Great Sutton as well as being part of a wider team of Wellbeing Coordinators in West Cheshire across which we constantly share knowledge and experience.

I have always had a strong interest in the way social factors can affect a person's overall health and wellbeing so this role enables me to use that knowledge and passion for the benefit of our patients.

Do you see any changes coming to your role?

I think given the current pandemic and the ways in which people have been affected and will continue to be affected, we are changing how we work with patients and the type of issues coming through are already apparent. That is, we are currently offering telephone consultations until further notice and I am speaking to patients who have been affected financially by the pandemic, have been bereaved or whose mental health has been affected.

The role has always been a very adaptable one. I will continue to respond on an individual basis to the needs of the patients that I see.

Thank you Kathryn, it's a brilliant service to be able to offer our patients and their families, and we have had wonderful feedback about the support you offer. As we

have already said, I can see your role expanding further with recent events, and encourage people to get in touch to try and get the help they so need.