

East Barnwell Surgery

Advice on Prescription Project

Cambridge
& District



citizens
advice

Year 1 Review

Background

There are a number of academic studies demonstrating links between poverty and poor health. Even in the UK with the theoretical safety net of benefits, the system is so complex that not everyone in need knows to what they are entitled, or has the ability to claim it. In addition, those with an adequate income do not always have the ability to manage it effectively, with a consequent negative effect on their health.

The Advice on Prescription Project was set up to provide an advice service at the East Barnwell Health Centre to which GPs and other medical staff could refer appropriate patients. It was envisaged that many of these would have stress and anxiety issues. Although medical referrals would be prioritised, patients could also self-refer via the Health Centre reception desk.

The East Barnwell Health Centre was chosen for the project as it is one of the furthest from the city centre and has poor transport links to the bureau's main office. It has the most deprived practice population in Cambridge which Public Health England's National GP profile puts in the 4th worst decile nationally. In addition, there was already support for the project within the practice.

The service started on 27 April 2015 and operated two days a week, with a third day set aside for follow up work. This report covers the period 27 April 2015 to 30 April 2016.

The Clients and their Problems

Across the year, our adviser made 120 appointments and saw 67 different patients. Some of the patients had a number of complex interrelated problems requiring several appointments to resolve. Others required additional support appointments to progress issues such as complex disability benefit applications and Debt Relief Orders. A number also came back one or more times with entirely unrelated problems. The most common reasons for referral were:

- Benefit problems (40.3%)
- Housing (29.9%)
- Debts (13.4%)
- Relationship/family (10.4%)

Employment problems (6.0%) were less common than some originally expected. However this may be due to patients who were unemployed or unfit to work being classed as having presented with Benefit rather than Employment problems.

As is usual for Citizens Advice clients, presenting problems rarely related to a single issue. In total the adviser needed to address and deal with 325 separate issues, an average of 4.9 issues per patient and 2.7 per appointment. In some cases, such as when completing Personal Independence Payment applications, appealing a benefit decision or applying for a Debt Relief Orders, they would have enlisted the help of specialist staff back at the main office.

As expected, there was a much higher level of disability and long term health problems amongst this client group than that of Cambridge Citizens Advice clients as a whole. During the registration process 19% of clients seen at the Health Centre declared themselves to be disabled and 51% to have long term health

problems. This compares with 8% declaring a disability and 25% a long term health problem amongst all clients seen in 2015-16.

The Financial Outcomes for patients from benefits, debt right offs and other sources

Nearly half of all patients seen had money problems. Many needed help claiming benefits to which they were entitled, and others were weighed down with debt. Some needed help drawing up a weekly budget.

Overall the service assisted patients to claim over £142,500 of benefits to which they were entitled (back payments plus annualised weekly amount) and obtain a further £3,900 from charitable grants and other sources. It also removed the burden of debts totalling £84,300 from patients, either by successfully challenging wrongful demands or through Debt Relief Orders and Bankruptcy Petitions.

This amounts to a total annual financial gain of over £230,800, which is an average of £3,444 per patient.

Other outcomes

These are harder to track and quantify, but we have certainly prevented at least one immediate threat of homelessness and helped patients involved in another ongoing tenancy case to obtain legal representation.

End of Year Patient Survey

At the end of the year a patient survey was conducted using a combination of internet and telephone questionnaires. 27 responses were obtained (40% of patients seen but roughly 50% of those we were in a position to try to contact).

Key findings were:

- 74% said that at the time they saw the adviser their day-to-day activities were limited because they were not well or had a disability. (This is broadly in line with the results of data collected at registration but it should be noted that the survey question specified that the condition was life limiting).
- 37% of respondents said their problem had been successfully resolved and 59% said it had been partly resolved. (In many cases this was because work is ongoing or they are awaiting decisions or actions from third parties such as the Department of Work and Pensions).
- 25% said that their condition had improved since seeing the adviser.
- 59% said that their anxiety/stress levels had reduced following the advice and support given by the CAB.
- 61% of respondents who said that they had discussed or received support with benefits, debt or budgeting issues said that they could manage their money better as a result.
- 19% of respondents said that they now see their GP less often than they did before seeing the adviser.

A frequent observation made by respondents was the ease of accessing the service, and in a number of cases, the difficulty they would have faced if they had been referred to an unfamiliar location in the City.

End of Year East Barnwell Staff Survey

The survey of East Barnwell Health Centre staff was conducted using a self completion paper questionnaire sent to both medical and reception/support staff.

Key findings from the medical staff (GP's and nurses) were:

- All who had referred patients to the service believed it had been of benefit to both their patients, and to their own work.
- There was general agreement that benefits to patients were not only financial, but also a reduction in their levels of stress and anxiety, as well as improvements in their general health and wellbeing.
- Over half the respondents said they envisaged making more referrals to the service in future.

The point raised by some patients about the difficulty they would face accessing a service outside of their local neighbourhood was echoed by one of the GPs.

Delivery of the Service

The resources of Cambridge Citizens Advice are already fully committed and it would be impossible to provide an immediate appointment for East Barnwell patients without employing an extra member of staff to do this. The cost of doing so is the same, apart from £1,500 for travel, whether it is based at the main office or at the Health Centre.

The journey from East Barnwell to Devonshire Road is about 2.5 miles, too far for many of the patients seen to walk. There is no direct bus and for mobility, confidence and cost reasons a significant proportion of the patients referred would not make the journey. The taxi fare each way is around £11.00, i.e. £22 per appointment and too much for many to pay. The total cost of providing a free taxi service to and from appointments would have been an extra £2,640 and would have been difficult to administer.

The results of the patient survey together with the complexity of most of the problems we have dealt with confirms our initial view that a telephone based service would not meet the needs of this client group and would have posed a significant barrier to access.

There is no evidence of a reduction in client numbers or the waiting time for appointments at the main office as a result of running this project. However, not all appointments slots at East Barnwell were filled last year and so there is capacity to accept additional referrals which the medical staff expect to make in 2016-17.

Conclusions

The financial benefit to patients is clear. Moreover the financial gains for patients considerably exceeded the £24,741 annual cost of running the project.

Medical staff are of the opinion that the project has been of benefit to the health of the patients and their own work looking in after them. This view confirmed by the patient survey, particularly in relation to levels of stress and anxiety.

Patients valued the service being provided locally in a familiar location and a number expressed concern about their ability to access a similar service being provided at the main office in Cambridge.

The client profile results support the patients' feedback that basing the service at the Health Centre has significantly improved their ability to access advice.

There would have been no cost advantage in basing the service at the main office.

There service has the capacity to accept the increased number of referrals anticipated 2016-17.

Due to the complex and interconnected nature of the non medical problems faced by many of the patients, sorting these out usually took more than one appointment as well as waiting for responses from third party agencies. As a result at the end of the year, a number of clients seen in 2015-16 are still receiving assistance.

Taken as a whole, the findings make a clear case for maintaining the service in its present form at the East Barnwell Health Centre and for its expansion to others.

John Knox

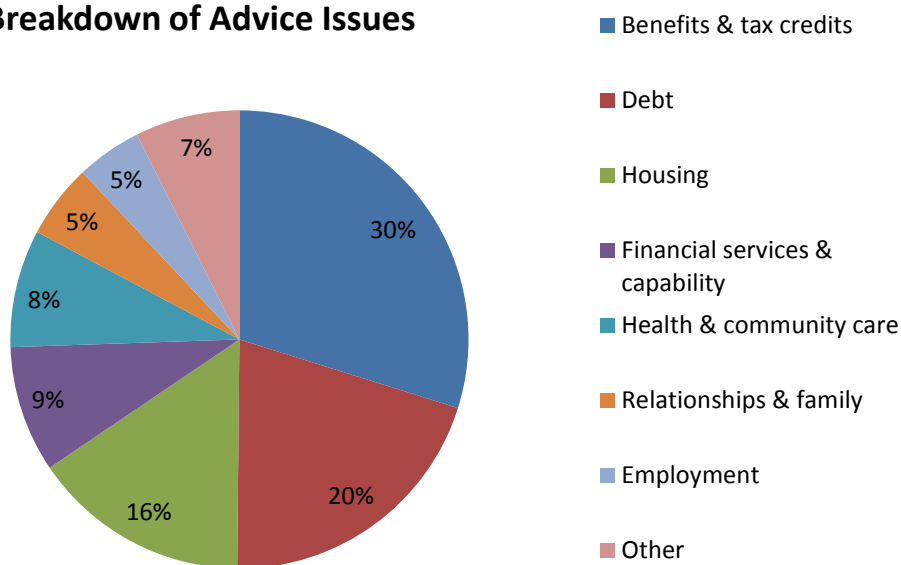
17 June 2016

Appendix 1:

In the first year our Adviser has seen 67 patients and undertaken approximately 120 complicated and time consuming appointments and dealt with 325 different issues.

Issues raised during appointments	
Benefits & tax credits	97
Consumer goods & services	6
Debt	66
Employment	15
Financial services & capability	29
Health & community care	27
Housing	50
Immigration & asylum	2
Legal	5
Other	6
Relationships & family	17
Travel & transport	4
Utilities & communication	1
Total issues	325

Breakdown of Advice Issues



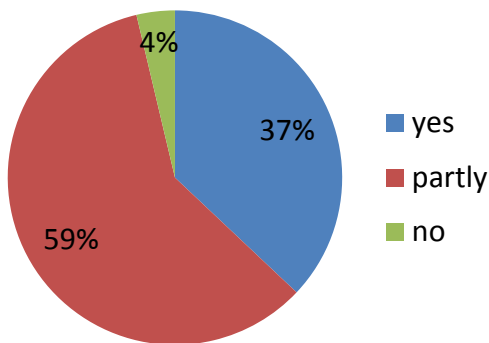
Financial outcomes:

Benefit gains:	£140,306.16
Debts written off:	£84,310.26
Other financial gains:	£15,555.26
Total financial outcomes:	£240,171.68

Appendix 2: The Patient Survey

This was conducted by a mixture of email and telephone surveys, both using the same questionnaire. The five clients seen for the first time within the final month of the year were not included in the survey as, in many cases, it would be too early to know the final outcome of the work done. Also excluded for obvious reasons were the four anonymous clients. Thus the 27 completed questionnaires obtained represented a 47% response rate.

Was your problem successfully sorted out?



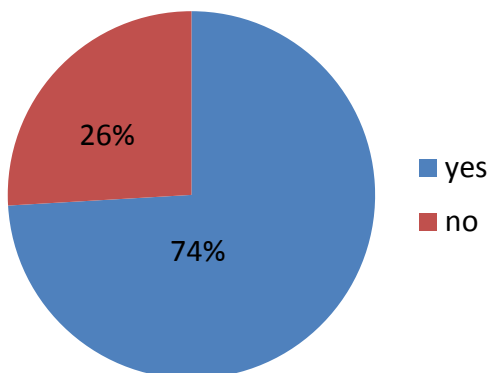
Respondents were asked 'Following your appointment with the CAB adviser, was your problem successfully sorted out?'

37% said that their problem was successfully resolved and 59% said it was partially resolved.

A number of reasons contribute to a relatively high proportion of partly responses:

- Clients with irresolvable problems
- Clients who are advised that they are not entitled to what they hoped they were.
- Clients with multiple problems which are being presented to the adviser one at a time.
- The speed with which patients wish or are able to deal with
- The timing of the survey and the length of time taken to get a result from third parties on issues such as Personal Independence Payments, debt problems and housing priority changes.

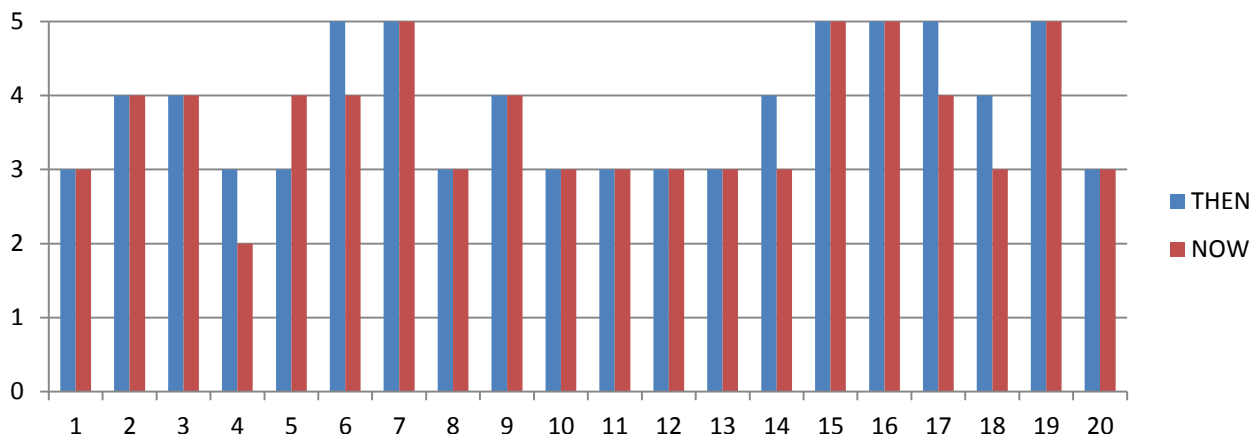
Patients with life limiting conditions



To identify these, respondents were asked 'At the time you saw the adviser, were your day-to-day activities limited because you were not well or had a disability?'

The relatively high proportion of clients who said yes appears to be in line with the original design of the project.

Life-limiting Impact of Medical Condition



Respondents who said that they had a condition which affected their daily lives were asked to rate the severity of its impact before they saw the adviser and now on a five point scale (1 being not at all and 5 very high).

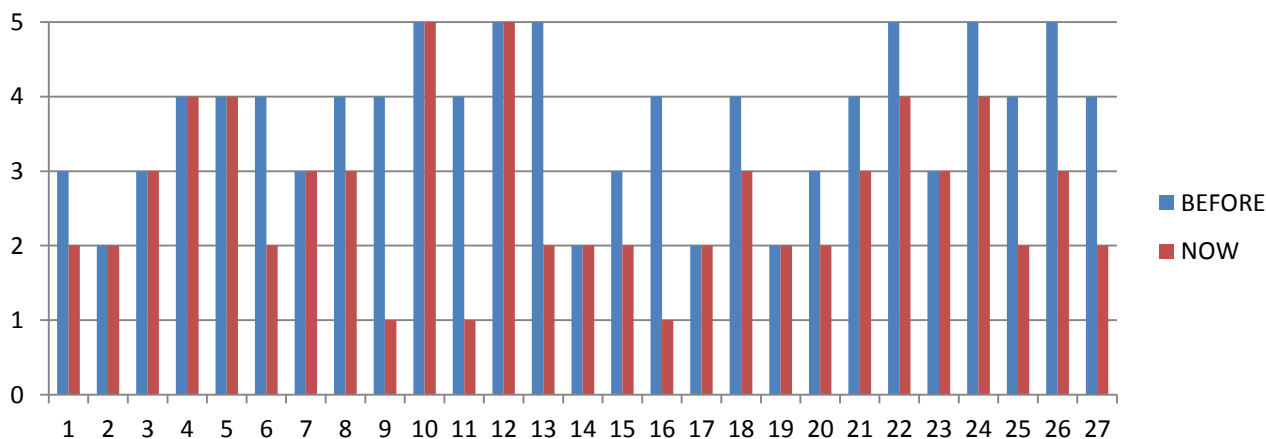
25% of respondents said that their condition was better now than before they saw the adviser. 5% (one individual) said their health condition had worsened (though in terms of our work, she had been assisted to claim extra benefit and she was better off as a result). The average impact score for this group before advice and support was 3.85 and is now 3.65.

Clearly the most likely therapeutic outcomes of the service are a reduction in anxiety /stress and general wellbeing improvements such as more money to spend on food, heating and housing. Although the nature of respondent’s conditions were not explored in the survey, evidence from the interviews suggests that many had longstanding physical ailments which were less likely to improve than stress or anxiety conditions.

I think these three graphs are quite important- worth highlighting in the main text.

Life limiting illness is the same, so people are not biased into reporting better health by seeing an adviser, but do report less stress and anxiety.

Effect on Stress and Anxiety Levels

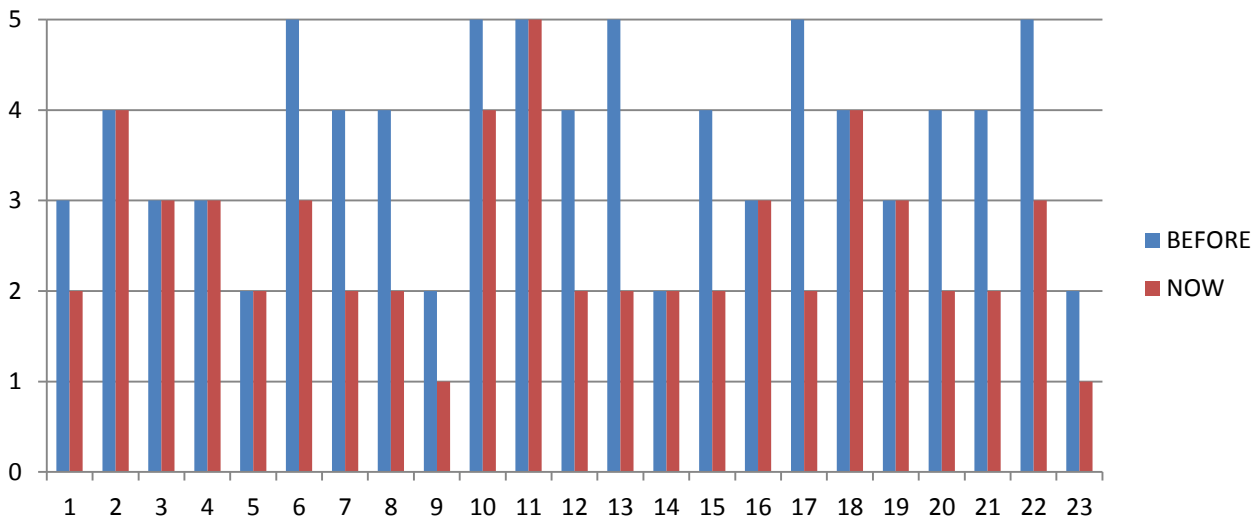


Respondents were asked 'How would you rate your worry/stress levels BEFORE you saw the adviser and NOW?'

59% of respondents said that seeing the adviser and getting her support had reduced their stress and anxiety levels.

The average pre-interview stress/anxiety score for all respondents was 3.70, and that now after advice and support is 2.67, a reduction of 1.03.

Difficulty Managing their Money

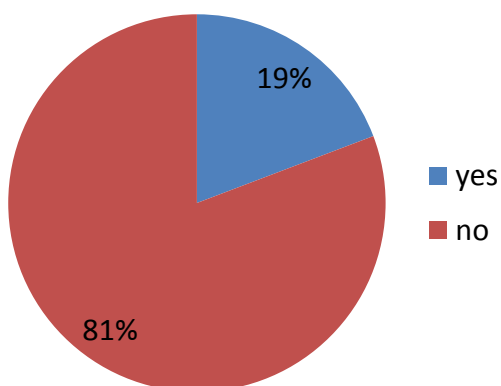


Respondents were asked 'If you discussed benefits, debts or budgeting with the adviser, how would you rate your ability to manage your money BEFORE seeing the adviser and now?'

85% of respondents said they had discussed benefits, debt or budgeting with the adviser and 61% of these felt better able to manage their money after their help and support.

The average pre-interview difficulty managing money score for respondents was 3.70 and that after advice and support 2.57, a reduction of 1.13.

Effect Advice & Support on Frequency of Visits to GP



Respondents were asked 'Would you say that you see your GP or other health staff less often since seeing the adviser?'

19% said that yes.

It is hard to say whether this is the result of the advice and support they received, the treatment they received or a general improvement in their condition.

Comments and Suggestions put Forward by Patients

Over 80% of respondents commented on the service, all favourably. The main themes were its convenience, ease of access, the familiarity of the location, and quality of the service.

A number of patient with disabilities commented on the difficulty they would have had going to town for advice, in particularly to places they had not gone to before.

- *Very easy. Right on the doorstep and very easy to get hold of you. I found the service extremely good. I was able to speak in confidence and not worry about it. In fact I was worried about the project ending.*
- *I like the service being there. It was not the adviser's fault that I cannot get help with prescription costs.*
- *The appointment was very helpful but I am still awaiting the result of my benefit (PIP) application*
- *It was very helpful.*
- *It is a good idea. I did not know where to go to get help and knew where the appointment was.*
- *Condition has improved slightly.*
- *Brilliant. I am a wheelchair user and I could access it easier than a service in town*
- *Very useful*
- *Very good idea to have services in Drs so thank you for having one at my Drs surgery. I hope it stays there*
- *The adviser did not believe how bad this Government is!!!*
- *Valuable service to the community*
- *Regarding the outreach service, "I find it very comforting".*
- *Easy and straightforward to access. I felt the service was really helpful, really beneficial. The advice I was given was really brilliant. I was really surprised at how good the advice and information was.*
- *The service is very helpful. In view of my condition it being at the surgery made it much easier than going to a new destination in town (Patient has vision problems). It made it easier than coming to town*
- *Fantastic! Easier. Familiar location so creates less anxiety.*
- *It makes getting help easier and saves time*
- *A useful service but it is not really geared up to advise on my particular problem (family/relationships) so I had to be referred to a solicitor.*
- *The adviser was very helpful. Also I would have had difficulty going down to the main office in Devonshire Road.*
- *The surgery is a familiar location. I have difficulty going to new places.*
- *More convenient.*
- *I think it is a very valuable service to have at a surgery.*
- *Brilliant! Much easier to get there.*

Appendix 3: East Barnwell Health Centre Staff Survey

A survey of medical and reception/support staff was conducted amongst at the East Barnwell Health Centre. Seven responses were received from the medical staff and six from the reception/support staff.

All the medical staff in the practice that completed the survey had referred patients to the service apart from the midwives.

All who had referred patients believed it had been a benefit to both their patients and to their own work. This was explained by one GP: *'Very helpful with patients who are facing many challenges and finding it difficult to get themselves sorted out. Removes the need for further signposting in the consultation.'*

There was also general agreement that the service had benefitted patients financially, by reducing their stress/anxiety levels and in terms of general health and wellbeing. However one GP observed that there had not been sufficient feedback on the outcome of the referrals to know for sure. (We are working to address this issue)

Four out of the seven foresaw making more referrals to the service in the second year and the other three envisaged their level of referrals being similar to this year.

Their General comments about the service are listed below:

- *It feel as if this is an increasingly valued service for many patients the relatively short distance that they would otherwise need to travel to get to a CAB is a barrier to access.*
- *The figures on the accompanying spreadsheet I have just seen are impressive.*
- *Excellent service really valued by patients and staff*
- *The service has proved to be a success so far. Most patients seem to appreciate the proximity and the value of this service.*
- *Very much hope the service continues to be offered to this vulnerable patient group.*
- *It would be great if the service could continue.*

The reception/support staff were responsible for referring a significant number of patients to the service as there are promotional posters in the main waiting area at the Health Centre. In addition, as one respondent explained *'we are familiar faces, and therefore able to promote the service'*.

All felt that the service was of benefit to the patients and they envisage making more referrals to it in the coming year.