

QuDoS in MS Recognition Programme Outstanding MS Physiotherapist Winner

Your name, job title, and centre

Erin Cooper and Nikki Grey, advanced practitioner physiotherapists in pelvic health,
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Project / initiative name

Pelvic health physiotherapy pilot programme

Project start date

2020



Challenge

1. Pelvic health problems can be embarrassing and challenging to live with, causing a barrier to social integration and reduced quality of life.
2. Although patients with MS are more likely to develop pelvic health complications, such as bladder and bowel dysfunction, there was no dedicated pelvic health team for MS patients within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to help individuals manage their symptoms and offer advice and support.
3. Instead, patients were referred to the continence service for assessment for intermittent self-catheterisation and pads. However, consultants realised that patients required more in-depth answers to their questions.
4. A need existed to establish a dedicated pathway for neurology to send patients to a pelvic health team, which would be able to help educate patients about their pelvic health before it reached a point where intervention would be more difficult.

Solution

A two-year pelvic health physiotherapy pilot programme – led by Erin Cooper with assistance from Nikki Gray during maternity leave – was established to bridge the gap between neurology and pelvic health for MS patients.

Education sessions were delivered for patients, neurologists, MS nurses, and the wider physiotherapy service to raise awareness of the role of a pelvic health physiotherapist and the role that physiotherapy can play in helping patients to overcome and manage issues such as urinary and faecal incontinence.

Results

Since the service was established in 2020, it has received more than 200 referrals. Patients now have earlier input, so their pelvic health conditions are getting seen earlier and they're getting addressed earlier, so that hopefully they can manage for longer and with more independence in the future.

From a patient satisfaction survey, 100% of patients felt it was beneficial to have a dedicated MS pelvic health physiotherapy service, with 96% of respondents reporting that they would recommend the service to others.

We were very sensitive about the topic that we were discussing and one of our patients said it made a great difference to their confidence in dealing with their pelvic health condition.

Next steps

Every patient is an individual, and they all need an individual treatment plan and input. Currently, I am not trained in intermittent self-catheterising (ISC), so if a patient has retention of their bladder when we do a bladder scan, we have to refer them to the continence team, and there is a really long waiting list.

The next stage is to undergo ISC training and hopefully develop the service to give a patient one journey.

What has been the biggest challenge?

When my job would've been starting, COVID hit. Everything went on to telephone assessments, advice over the phone. I think, for a lot of us, the pandemic made us realise that we can adapt when we want to, but it was probably one of the biggest changes we all had to respond to.

At that point of time, I also was pregnant, so I had to go off shielding at 28 weeks, which was a month and a half into my role.

How did you overcome this challenge?

Very quickly I realised how much work there was and how much I could do on my own. It was really good for my confidence.

Nikki took over for those 10 or 11 months while I was off on maternity leave. She did a really great job of holding the service together because, obviously, two months in going on maternity leave, I suppose that's when the service could have fallen down around us.

What would be your advice to others wanting to replicate this project?

I think the big thing is look at your area and see what other people are doing. Research what's currently happening to see if there is a need, and if you can fulfil that need.



“We do what we can. It's just always focusing on the service user; what do they want and how can we help them achieve that?”

Erin Cooper

Outstanding MS Physiotherapist Winner

Take a break.

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