

AHP Support workers role in improving the public's health

Over the past three years the allied health professionals (AHPs) have been increasing their focus on [improving the public's health](#) and have been recognised as a leading part of the [wider public health workforce](#). However the focus this far has been on the registered AHPs and we have missed the huge potential of AHP support workers, who I believe have just as great an opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of the people they work with.

For this reason I was pleased to commission Allied Health Solutions to undertake a review of the current and potential contribution of AHP support workers to improving the public's health. This review has been published today on www.alliedhealthsolutions.co.uk and shows how AHP support workers are engaging in public health. It provides information which will be of interest to professional bodies, employers and national organisations.

The work was undertaken by Professor Mary Lovegrove OBE and June Davis, and includes surveys and workshops with both AHP support workers and their managers to explore which areas of public health activity support workers were actively engaged in.

The responses highlighted some examples of work already being done to support self-management, infection control, rehabilitation and enablement and promote healthy lifestyles. However, it was clear that public health was not routinely incorporated into job descriptions or appraisals and few support workers had accessed training relevant to public health such as making every contact count and how to deliver public health messages

This highlighted that the movement to increase recognition of the public health role of AHPs has, in the main, missed AHP support workers. Yet there is opportunity and willingness to engage further and there are some fabulous examples of this.

In my previous role I worked with some amazing dietetic support workers who, as local members of the community, worked with families and schools to increase understanding of healthy eating messages and the cooking skills required to implement them. Such was their impact that when they did a session using vegetable curry in an area where people typically relied on fast food, the local shops sold out of aubergines. These roles took a community development approach and were 100% public health focused.

The winner of this year's Advancing Healthcare Award public health prize was a physiotherapy department from Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust which employed AHP support workers to undertake the NHS Health Check and Diabetes Prevention Programme checks as part of a muscular skeletal physiotherapy service. This approach not only provides a more holistic service but it improves the quality of the physiotherapists intervention by giving more time to focus on treatment. An added bonus is that it is income generating.

So how do we make this approach more widespread?

Recommendations from the report encourage:

- Professional bodies to engage support workers in the work they are already undertaking to increase focus on public health
- AHPs and support workers themselves to review the public health opportunity and training available so that healthy conversations are incorporated into daily practice and the wider opportunities to promote the public health aspects of support worker roles are taken.

I will commit to ensuring that I take more opportunities to encourage and shout about the contribution of this important workforce.