Physical activity is commonly referred to as a ‘miracle drug’, as it has shown to prevent and treat a number of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, as well as benefitting our mental wellbeing. 2013 marks 10 years since the launch of EOP in South Gloucestershire. This special edition bulletin celebrates some of the achievements over the last decade, and EOP’s contribution to improving the health and wellbeing of our residents.

The way the partnerships and pathways of EOP has developed over the past 10 years demonstrates the breadth of service for referred patients in South Gloucestershire including Cardiac phase IV rehabilitation, LEEP(Lung Exercise education programme), DAT (Drug and Alcohol) team and Mental health.

Working in partnership with Circadian Leisure Trust is an integral part of the EOP service. Working in partnership with Primary care and other referring health professionals has been a key factor in the success of EOP. This was highlighted in 2010 when EOP achieved the prestigious APSE award in the Health and Social care category for partnership working.

The EOP team consists of 7 highly trained physical activity specialists supporting individuals with the challenge of behaviour change to meet their individual goals. These specialists work alongside patients to help increase their exercise levels as well as build physical activity into their everyday lives. In January 2013, EOP and Circadian were awarded a contract to deliver the physical activity component of South Gloucestershire’s Tier 1 Adult Weight Management Service - Lifeshape.

In April 2013, Local Government became responsible for Public Health at a local level. EOP is now part of a new directorate in the Council called the ‘Department for Children Adults and Health’.

Exercise on Prescription (EOP) was launched in 2003 and aimed at people who would benefit from increasing their levels of exercise and being more active. Patients who benefit normally have one of the following conditions:

- Diabetes
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Coronary heart disease (CHD)
- Depression
- Hypertension
- Hyperlipidaemia

Since 2003, more than 7,500 people in South Gloucestershire have been referred, with an average of 750 people each year. Most people (64%) have been referred for help with their weight, whilst almost a third (29%) have been referred for help with depression.

The case studies on page 2 illustrate how some people have benefitted from being referred to the service.
Tracey’s story

Over a year ago my weight was 18st 7lbs.

I started swimming every week and my GP recommended exercise on prescription. This made swimming cheaper and soon my simple breast stroke turned into front crawl, and my 20 lengths turned into half a mile every other day!

I changed my diet, incorporating lots of lean protein and vegetables and the weight started to slowly come off. I still ate the odd treat but pushed myself to swim a few extra lengths when I did.

My work hours changed meaning I could get in the pool before work started. It was hard to drag myself out of bed but I knew I had to do it! The summer was fantastic but the cold snowy days were not so.

Before I knew it exercise became part of my daily life, it took the edge off my anxiety. The peace and quiet, feeling the cool water around me and the sound of my music on my MP3 player made swimming feel more like a therapy than a chore. Over time my stroke improved and I got faster. I made friends with other swimmers and in June I swam the race for life (cancer research) 5km, I never thought I could swim 3.1 miles (200 lengths) but due to perseverance and hard work this is now a reality!

I now weigh 14st 7lbs. I’m a lot leaner and have much more self confidence. I still swim as it has become a part of who I am. It’s been a hard slog and some times I want to stay in bed but it’s been worth it as I feel so much healthier.

I changed my diet, incorporating lots of lean protein and vegetables and the weight started to slowly come off.
A South Glos GP was referred to EOP

This is their story.

Having been overweight most of my adult life I was deeply suspicious of gyms and any activity involving lycra. It was with some trepidation that I accepted my GP’s offer to attend EOP, I was over fifty, unfit and overweight.

The EOP co-ordinator reassured me that many people have these worries and arranged an induction appointment, explaining that the scheme was never intended for the super fit!

I had never used a gym before and was convinced that I would stick out like a sore thumb against the toned bodies. However, my EOP co-ordinator put me at my ease and as we discussed my health. I was weighed and measured and encouraged to set myself some goals.

I went along the following week wearing my brand new trainers, which I was gently teased about! I started riding an exercise bike and progressed to walking fast on a treadmill. I was introduced to less familiar items like a cross trainer and a rowing machine. By the end of the session I had been breathless and broken into a sweat. I felt very pleased with myself.

Staff were very encouraging and the 12 weeks was a great experience. I have spent most of my adult life overweight and unfit and exercise on prescription was a starting point allowing me to make a different choice.

After completing the programme I continued to attend the gym. I am now much fitter and my BMI is under 25. One of my goals was to start running, and I have now entered several 5ks, 10k and even ran the Bath half marathon in March 2013. I will always be grateful to the exercise on prescription team for helping me to make a different choice.

Continuous improvement

EOP is committed to continuous service improvement by evaluating the effectiveness of the scheme and to use on-going findings to shape the future development and ensure the scheme meets the needs of its service users.

The Health and Wellbeing Division has recently commissioned the University of Gloucestershire to undertake an evaluation of the service. This will provide intelligence on characteristic groups and give recommendations that can be utilised and used to inform and implement future improvements to EOP.

There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of increasing the levels of physical activity in people with cancer; EOP is currently working with Macmillan to integrate this within the existing EOP pathway so the people of South Gloucestershire can access specific support with increasing their activity under specialist guidance and support.
What our partners say…

Cardiac rehabilitation team

The Cardiac Rehabilitation Team at North Bristol NHS Trust, have been referring patients into phase IV programmes across South Gloucestershire since 2003. The patients are advised to attend after their eight week phase III exercise programmes, to continue their recovery by exercising under supervision in their local community. Uptake to phase IV continues to rise year on year, with patient uptake in our local area being higher than the national average. We are lucky to be able to provide a seamless transition to the next stage of our patient’s recovery and are very grateful to the EOP team in South Gloucestershire for their ongoing support.

Mark Pietroni, director of Public Health, South Gloucestershire Council said

“EOP is an outstanding example of partnership and has been run jointly by South Gloucestershire Council and South Gloucestershire NHS since 2003, with strong involvement of local GPs and the Circadian Trust. With the move of Public Health to the local authority in April this year, the EOP team and PH team are now part of the health and wellbeing division. Reducing weight and increasing exercise help to improve premature mortality from cardiovascular causes. Public Health England’s recent publication ‘Longer Lives’ shows that South Gloucestershire already ranks amongst the best performing areas in the country and we hope to further improve in the years to come. My best wishes to all on EOP’s 10 year anniversary!”

Mark Crutchley, Chief Executive of Circadian Trust said

“Circadian Trust is proud to be a founding partner of the EOP programme, and its success is a testament to all staff, either employees of the programme, at leisure centres and within primary health care who are successfully changing local lifestyles. The programme really does work. Over the years hundreds of South Gloucestershire residents have been encouraged and persuaded to improve their lifestyle by adopting more physical activity to assist them in recovery and rehabilitation from or prevention of illness and injury. A great many of the programmes previous participants are now longstanding customers of leisure centres and continue to incorporate healthy physical activity into their lives.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the programme – here’s to the next ten years”

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