

Agenda Item 89

Chiropody Services within Brighton and Hove

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to describe current provision for chiropody services in Brighton and Hove.

2. National policy

The Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson, recently called for footcare services, in particular toenail cutting, to be “*made more accessible to older people, and delivered in an integrated way across all providers of such services*”.

His view is also informed by the Age Concern¹ report that states that “*lack of even the most basic foot care puts the elderly at risk of complications that lead to dangerous falls, severe restrictions on mobility and social isolation*”.

3. Current Service Provision

Podiatry care within Brighton and Hove is delivered via two services:

- South Downs Health NHS Trust is commissioned to provide specialist foot care for patients with complex health needs resulting in foot problems.
- Age Concern provides nail cutting services for patients with low level podiatry needs who do not require specialist care.

3.1. Foot Health Service

The Foot Health Service is provided by South Downs Health NHS Trust for patients registered with a Brighton and Hove GP.

The service provides specialist foot care for patients with complex health needs resulting in foot problems.

Referrals are made by any health or social care professional although the vast majority are made by GPs. Self referrals are accepted from the parents or guardians of children and from persons aged 75 years and over.

Referrals are triaged (process for prioritising patients) by the lead podiatrists and given a degree of urgency to ensure timely access to care. The patients are also signposted to a specialist clinic (e.g. Musculoskeletal, nail surgery assessment etc) if appropriate.

At the first appointment, access to Foot Health services is determined by both medical and clinical need. A scoring system is used to ensure an objective approach. This assesses medical and clinical podiatric status and also includes a symptom (pain) assessment.

¹ Primary Concerns, Age Concern, September 2008

A combination of these elements provides an overall score which is checked against a threshold. If the threshold is reached the patient is offered treatment which will focus on podiatric intervention and enabling the patient to contribute to their own foot care where appropriate and safe to do so.

A curative approach is taken to encourage a person's independence and to decrease their need for interventional podiatry where possible.

The Foot Health Service is a multi disciplinary team consisting of podiatrists, podiatry assistants, an appliance technician and administrative office staff. The service operates Monday to Friday from 08.30 until 17.00. With three evening clinics for working age people every Tuesday until 8 pm.

If a person's specialist needs prevents them attending a clinic site, hospital transport (with an escort if required) can be arranged. Domiciliary visits are available for persons who are housebound. If an existing patient's status changes the podiatrist can authorise subsequent home visits as appropriate without recourse to the original referrer or GP.

If communication difficulties exist appropriate interpreters are booked via the Sussex Interpreting Services.

Urgent appointments are offered within 2 working days and urgent (nail surgery) appointments are offered within 10 working days. Children are offered appointments as soon as possible following referral. All other patients are placed on an appropriate waiting list. The average wait for an assessment appointment is approx. 3-4 weeks for routine podiatry and 6 weeks for musculoskeletal podiatry. Where appropriate, assessment and treatment is given at the first appointment.

The total cost of the service is £1.2m.

3.2. Age Concern Nail Cutting Service

Age Concern provides non complex nail cutting to low risk patients. It is not able to meet the needs of diabetic patients or those on medications.

The service supports an average of 50 service users per week and is provided at Portslade Health Centre, Whitehawk Health Centre, Age Concern and in individual's homes.

There are various routes of access to the service. Service users can be referred to Age Concern by their GP, the current South Downs Health Specialist Podiatry service following completion of initial care or by other health and social care professionals such as Intermediate Care. There is also the option to self refer.

NHS Brighton and Hove contributes £17k per annum towards the cost of the service. Service users are charged however where they are unable to afford the full cost of the service, Age Concern subsidises the cost.

Regular contract review meetings are held between commissioners and providers. The contract is managed via the Local Authority Contracts Unit.

The two services work very closely together with the Foot Health service focussing on more complex podiatric conditions and Age Concern managing the low risks cases. Podiatrists from the Foot Health service participate in contract review meetings with Age Concern to identify areas where the service can work together more effectively and support each other.

The current service model which supports both complex and non complex patients enables the PCT to provide comprehensive, timely podiatry provision across the city in line with national policy and ensuring appropriate use of specialist resources.

4. Future developments

The Foot Health Service was reviewed in 2008 as part of a wider review of community services provided by South Downs Health and was deemed to be good in terms of strategic fit and quality. Actions from that review include the development of a detailed service specification and the implementation of patient outcome measures.

The Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists have participated in a review with the Department of Health to find models of practice that may enhance access to foot health services. Our local model which links NHS funded foot health services with Age Concern has been described as part of that process.

The Age Concern Nail Cutting service will be reviewed during 2009/2010 as part of a wider programme at NHS Brighton and Hove to review independent sector contracts for older people. Current national policy around prevention programmes for older people and the importance of basic foot care in helping older people to retain their independence will inform the outputs of that review.

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