Changing the conversations

Implementing a care and support planning approach for people attending specialist adult weight management services

The recommissioning of the tier 3 specialist adult weight management (AWM) service in North Tyneside in 2014 provided the opportunity to redesign a more flexible person centred service that incorporated the principles of preparation for a better conversation in addition to a goal setting and action planning approach as promoted by Year of Care Partnerships (YOCP).

Motivation to change

Supporting individuals to manage their weight is a complex challenge. At its most simple level weight is the product of calorie imbalance. There are a multitude of reasons for this imbalance ranging from lack of accurate information to deep seated psychological factors based on many years of unhelpful thinking and behaviour. Traditionally weight management work has been delivered in a 1:1 context or a 'one size fits all' 12 week group programme. The latter is more financially sustainable but does not typically enable detailed individual conversations to take place. We looked to blend these approaches when redesigning the service in North Tyneside.

"As a national trainer for Year of Care Partnerships and lead dietitian for Adult Weight Management I have been able to combine expertise from both roles to develop a new approach and an improved service"

Carolyn Forrest Lead Dietitian

Changing processes to enable better conversations

Preparation and sufficient time for the person to reflect before their conversation with a health care professional (HCP) is one of the key aspects of care and support planning. Conversations are most effective when there is a meeting between an **engaged and informed patient** and **a HCP committed to partnership working** supported by an organised proactive system (Wagner chronic care model). **The new service was redesigned with these principles in mind.**

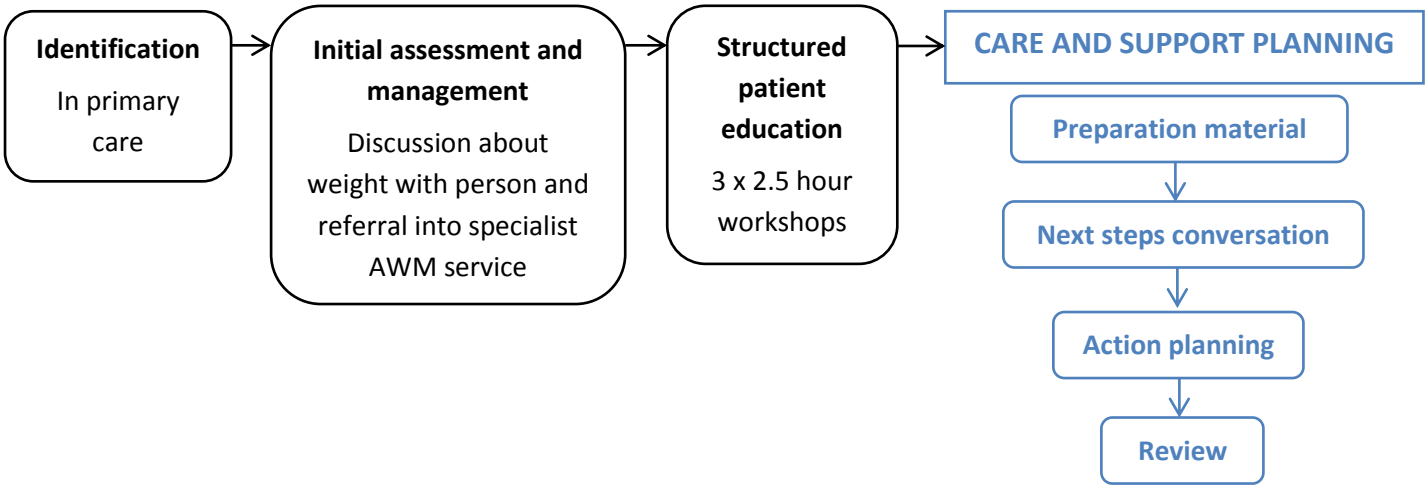
What is different about the new service?

People now attend 3 workshop **group education** sessions. These sessions encourage people to learn more about calorie balance and how to create a calorie deficit. They support people to self-manage by using food and activity diaries with reflective prompt questions to help individuals make their own conclusions about changes that would be relevant. People are often low in confidence particularly around activity and there is supported adapted exercise within the sessions to help people gain confidence. This part of the service encourages an 'informed patient'.

Once people have attended the 3 sessions they are invited to attend a care planning conversation which is known locally as the 'next steps' appointment. In this way only people who are 'engaged' with the service attend the 1:1 appointment.

Before introduction of care and support planning

After introduction of care and support planning



Preparation

A covering letter is sent to people 2 weeks before their appointment. This explains the purpose of the conversation, what people can expect and how long it will be (45 minutes.) It encourages people to do the preparation work so they can get the best out of the appointment. It lets people know about what our service can offer.

"Getting the letter before helped me to think about what had led me to gain weight. I thought about what would help me lose weight and keep it off this time and was able to get the help I need to do that." Patient

- People are asked to complete a short quiz to help them identify their personal triggers for over eating.
- Prompt questions are included in the letter – people are asked to think about what factors have caused them to gain weight, what things have worked well for them when trying to lose weight in the past and why. They are also asked to consider what caused them to stop losing weight. We aim to build on their previous experiences and help people identify what things are helpful to them as well as what behaviours are unhelpful.
- We ask them how their life is at that moment and whether there are things that might be barriers to focussing on the complex behaviours involved in weight loss. We are very aware that many of the people referred into our service live complex lives and many have histories of depression,

anxiety, family difficulties and medical problems all of which impact on their ability and confidence to lose weight.

- We then build on things people have learnt from the workshops and diaries and the changes they have started to make. We ask for their ideas about what would help them to lose weight.This is important as we recognize that people come into our service with lots of skills and expertise. As health care professionals we cannot 'solve' an individual's weight problem.

Better conversations

"I've had conversations about bereavement, bullying, emotional abuse, low self-esteem and relationship breakdowns. All of these have impacted on the individual's ability to focus on weight."
Adult weight management HCP

More people are coming to their appointments having thought about their weight issues. Some have ideas about what they would like to do next and we can move quickly to developing an action plan; others are still struggling to find their way and conversations are more complex. Some people arrive unprepared and this may reflect that weight loss isn't a priority for them at that time.

The complexity of the conversations has increased. Many people know what they should do in terms of behaviour however they feel they 'can't do it'. Often there are underlying social and psychological barriers to change. This has been a challenge for some staff as it requires a more **partnership based approach** rather than an advisory or educational role. Support from our psychologist is helping the team to change their approach.

Action planning during the next steps appointment

People are aware of the support available from the adult weight management service – this is covered at the workshops.

- They are contacted by the exercise leads before the next steps appointment to discuss activity options in more detail.
- Where action plans are focussed on increased activity or specific food and behaviour changes a detailed action plan is identified collaboratively.
- The action plan may involve attending the 8 week groups that cover food knowledge, behaviour change and topics such as mindfulness and negative thinking.
- It may include attending the supported exercise sessions or people may opt to be active independently but with guidance and encouragement from the exercise team.
- Some people may wish to attend sessions about managing diabetes and weight loss or preparing for bariatric surgery.
- For many the plan may be focussed on their thoughts or feelings. They can attend an emotional eating group run by the service or we signpost people to talking therapy services and self-help guides recommended by the psychology team.

Next steps for service development

Evaluation

We have collected evaluation data about the introductory workshops and this has been very positive with people reporting that they like the format of the sessions and that they have learnt or been reminded of facts around portion sizes and small changes. They have felt encouraged to make realistic changes to their activity level and many people continue with the home based exercise programme they learnt during the workshop.

We now intend to do some further evaluation of the next steps appointment and encourage the HCP to evaluate the quality of their conversations using one of the recognised tools.

Better networking with other support services

As a result of the care and support planning conversation we have been referring a number of people to talking therapies and social prescribing. We also work alongside the bariatric services, severe mental illness and learning disabilities teams.

We have learnt from the teams supporting people with severe mental illness and learning disabilities how to have more effective conversations with these groups of people. We need to develop better links with all teams and have conversations about how to work effectively together.

"This is the first time anyone has sat and listened to my story. I can really talk to you; you haven't dismissed me or told me what to do." Patient

"People come to the appointment with a clearer idea about what things have led them to struggle with their weight and some thoughts about what they might find helpful to work on."
Adult weight management HCP

Weight management is complex with many contributing factors and many potential options to support weight loss.

Having a good quality conversation that leads to a relevant and realistic plan is the priority for our service.

We have found that the key to these better conversations is ensuring that the person has time to prepare for the appointment and an opportunity to do some thinking about their weight.

The Year of Care approach to care and support planning is helping us to achieve this.