Mental health, social isolation and the Lindsay Leg Club model

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The Humber Bridge, in East Yorkshire, is a magnificent engineering achievement. It has the enviable claim of being the longest bridge in the world that it is possible to walk and cycle across. Or at least it was until March of this year, when it was closed to all pedestrian traffic due to the number of attempted and actual suicides. These catastrophic events are at the extreme end of the challenge posed by mental health across the country as the effects of COVID-19 takes its toll. As we have become better at managing the direct impact of COVID-19 through lockdown and vaccination, it is appropriate to reflect what impact the mental health challenges posed by this coronavirus is having on our Leg Club members. The essence of our model is that our Leg Clubs are social clinics, where whole person mental and social wellbeing are equally important as the physical treatment of wounds.

This is not just a question for the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation. The Government have backed their Mental Health Recovery Action Plan (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021) with £500m funding to help support people with mental health difficulties, ranging from severe mental illnesses such as bipolar and schizophrenia through to more common mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. They are aiming for more joined up support between primary and secondary care, including specialist mental health staff embedded in primary care.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock put it this way:

> *"As part of our response to this global pandemic we not only want to tackle the public health threat of coronavirus but ensure our clinicians have the resources to deal with the impact on people's mental health."*

A lot of this targeted support is designed for young people and those with severe mental illness, but the very same issues affect the (older) Leg Club members as well, who are likely to have been affected more than most by the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as many Leg Clubs have been forced to close their doors or operate in COVID-19 secure environments, we face a significant challenge as some Trusts again question the direct cost of treatment. However, social isolation and mental health is the new battleground, and evidence suggests that unless this is addressed then physical health will rapidly deteriorate also. The Leg Clubs epitomise the holistic nature of healthcare and

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The Humber bridge, East Yorkshire

the integration of health and social care, which is the clear direction of travel for the NHS and Government. It is clear that traditional methods of treatment are not working. The recent updated Burden of Wounds study, by Guest et al (2020), shows that the cost of treating all wounds increased by almost 50% 2013–2018 to £8.3bn, and there is no sign of this trend slowing. Of these wounds, 28% were accounted for by leg ulcers.

Long-term impacts on the local budget are likely as healed ulcers will recur more frequently and mental health trauma will increase. Physical health is nothing without mental wellbeing.

There have been a number of articles recently about how many days of work constitutes the ideal work/life balance. Most of us thought 3 or 4 days' work would be the answer, but apparently for most people just one day a week would provide perfect balance (if you are so lucky!). If it is reasonable to assume that people would then be inclined to work fewer days as they get older, then the sense of usefulness and value that volunteers get out of helping to run their Leg Club even for 1 or 2 days a month — whether it be making the tea or the cakes, greeting co-members at the door or chauffeuring people to and fro — goes a long way to give this balance by providing a sense of purpose and fulfilment as well as a social circle. The Leg Club model embraces the significant issues of isolation, loneliness, mental health and wellbeing and the ability to empower individuals through knowledge of their condition and its treatment, with a very direct involvement in their own care.

This approach contributes to the positive outcomes that can be achieved by members of their Leg Clubs through empathy and peer support. The following recently appeared in GP Magazine Pulse: (Seal 2018):

"Anyone who has suffered from loneliness, or social isolation, will know it is a situation that seems impossible to overcome, leading to depression and low self-esteem. For patients, this can be a vicious circle that prevents them making any positive moves to help themselves.

A strategy to deal with loneliness by new Minister of Loneliness Tracey Crouch MP should be welcomed, but one area to highlight and investigate is loneliness caused by some medical conditions. In 2015 at The Adam Practice in Poole, we made the biggest transformational change to a service that I have seen in 25 years. By taking on the Leg Club model and providing care in community settings such as church halls, with expert treatment from practice and district nurses, the lives of many of our patients have been transformed. In 2015, at The Adam Practice in Poole, we made the biggest transformational change to a service that I have seen in 25 years. By taking on the Leg Club model and providing care in community settings such as church halls, with expert treatment from practice and district nurses, the lives of many of our patients have been transformed.

Clinical evidence shows that social factors and isolation can significantly affect how leg ulcer patients respond to treatment. Healing rates were greatly reduced with some patients finding their ulcers, which normally took a couple of years to heal, were healed within three to six months.

Primary care nurses are now working side by side with community district nurses, sharing experience and information. It is about sharing a vision, removing stigma and giving these patients a whole new lease of life."

During the 2018 NHS Parliamentary debate Baroness Watkins of Tavistock, a Professor of Nursing cited in the Hansard report (Hansard, 2017):

"Leg clubs are built around the notion of promoting peoples' independence and wellbeing. This social model of care is proving effective not only in the treatment of the physical wound but in promoting people's independence and mental wellbeing by reducing loneliness and isolation".

Baroness Watkins also said that had she been aware of the Leg Club model as a nurse it would have benefited her patients more cost-effectively than the intervention she undertook, particularly in terms of productivity in nursing time.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health Lord O'Shaughnessy encouraged fellow

CONFERENCE UPDATE

Leg Club conference 2021 will instead take place on September 29 and 30 2021. For more information, visit our website: https://www.legclub.org/

SUPPORT US

The world is going through a very difficult time right now and charities need your support. To support The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation, please visit this website: https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/charity-web/charity/finalCharityHomepage.action?charityId=1001744

Lords to find out more about Leg Clubs because they provide (Hansard, 2017):

> *"...just the kind of activity and intervention that we want to see. It is not just about good care; it is also about individual psychosocial needs and health beliefs."*

Leg Clubs also see people with healthy legs requesting assessment and advice and even once an ulcer has healed the Leg Club continues to provide preventative care, in keeping the members ulcer-free with the 'Well Leg' programme. Members of the Leg Clubs can rely on a safe venue where their physical, psychological and social needs will be met within a social model of care.

Members have access to treatment, appropriate equipment, medical education, leg health, as well as general health, nutritional advice, social interaction and refreshments. The types of medical treatment available in Leg Clubs range from straightforward leg washes and stocking replacement, Doppler assessment and bandaging to complex cases such as extreme circulatory problems, which require further consultation and discussion. As one member stated:

> *"Leg Clubs deliver 'Social Prescribing' at it's very best!"*

LINDSAY LEG CLUB FOUNDATION YOU TUBE CHANNEL

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation (LLCF) has created a YouTube channel to help both health professionals and members of the public with lower limb conditions to stay informed about its work and that of its Leg Clubs.

The Leg Club Channel, which was set up earlier this month, already has over 150 videos available covering past LLCF conferences, wound care education, insights into how Leg Clubs operate and presentations from the vWIN Vein Week healthcare awareness initiative.

Ellie Lindsay OBE, founder and lifetime president of the LLCF, said:

> *"The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged us as an organisation to review how we communicate with both healthcare professionals and our Leg Club members. Technology has been a wonderful resource for allowing us all to stay in touch during this difficult period of time and has become a part of our daily life. With this in mind it seemed an opportune moment to expand our social media presence to stay in contact with our supporters and to reach new ones too."*

The LLCF currently has a social media presence on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter and its latest venture into running a YouTube channel can be found and subscribed to here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0_bQGl1gr2T8BM3noyKRlg WUK

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