CHOICE: Choosing Health Options In Chronic Care Emergencies

Elspeth Guthrie,1* Cara Afzal,2,3 Claire Blakeley,2,4 Amy Blakemore,4,5 Rachel Byford,6 Elizabeth Camacho,4,7 Tom Chan,6 Carolyn Chew-Graham,8 Linda Davies,7 Simon de Lusignan,5 Chris Dickens,9,10 Jessica Drinkwater,11 Graham Dunn,4,12 Cheryl Hunter,13 Mark Joy,14 Navneet Kapur,4,15 Susanne Langer,16 Karina Lovell,4,17 Jackie Macklin,18 Kevin Mackway-Jones,4,19 Dionysios Ntais,4,7 Peter Salmon,20 Barbara Tomenson4,12 and Jennifer Watson2,4

1Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
2Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Manchester, UK
3Greater Manchester Academic Health Science Network (GM AHSN), Manchester, UK
4Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK
5Centre for Primary Care, Institute of Population Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
6Department of Health Care Management and Policy, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK
7Centre for Health Economics, Institute for Population Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
8Research Institute, Primary Care and Health Sciences, Keele University, Keele, UK
9Institute of Health Research, Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
10Peninsula Collaboration for Leadership in Health Research and Care (PenCLAHRC), University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
11Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
12Centre for Biostatistics, Institute of Population Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
13Health Services Research Unit, Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
14Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing, Kingston University, London, UK
15Institute of Brain, Behaviour and Mental Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
16Department of Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK
Plain English summary

In this programme, we sought to understand whether or not psychological factors impacted on use of emergency health services by people with chronic physical illness, and to develop an intervention that may improve their health and reduce the need to use emergency services. We carried out scientific reviews, a large primary care study, in-depth interviews with patients and a small treatment trial.

We found that prior use of emergency health care, depression, life stressors and lack of a partner had significant impacts on use of emergency services in people with long-term physical illness. We also found that people sought help only when they really needed it and saw hospitals as being the right place to receive expert care.

We found that depression and the other psychological and social factors were rarely recognised by general practitioners (GPs) or discussed in annual health reviews. We worked with GP practices to try to improve their management of people who were likely to need emergency services, and we also worked with people with lived experience of chronic disease to develop a specific psychological treatment for people with long-term physical illness who were depressed or experiencing social difficulties.

It was difficult to get GP practices to change, but the psychological intervention, which involved weekly treatment sessions from a practice-based, liaison mental health worker, was very well received. There was preliminary evidence that recipients became less depressed and had less need to attend emergency departments, but there was no overall effect from the efforts to improve practice management.
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