

## Social prescribing available to all GPs in England by 2023

All England's GPs will be able to 'socially prescribe' activities like cooking and volunteering by 2023 under plans unveiled in the government's new loneliness strategy.

The government has announced it will fund activities such as cookery classes, walking clubs and art groups, and £1.8 million will also be invested in community spaces such as cafes and gardens to support the scheme.

The strategy will also see five pilot areas support flexible and inclusive volunteering for people with long-term health conditions, while loneliness will also be added to relationship education in schools, with resources for teachers by 2020.

Three quarters of GPs surveyed have said they are seeing between one and five people a day suffering with loneliness, which is linked to a range of damaging health impacts, like heart disease, strokes and Alzheimer's disease. Around 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with a friend or relative in more than a month.

Paul Cooper, RCOT professional adviser, said: 'Social prescribing will be very familiar to a lot of occupational therapists and we stand ready to deliver this agenda.'

'Occupational therapists working in primary care must challenge traditional boundaries of practice, promote their skills in social prescribing and seek opportunities to lead social prescribing initiatives as this strategy is put into action.'

'It's really important that we make sure opportunities for social participation can be adapted to ensure people with complex physical and mental health problems, or people who are frail, can access them. They are often those who can benefit the most from leisure and social activities but need the most support, and occupational therapists are the ideal professionals to make that happen.'

'Occupational therapists need to establish links with workers who deliver on social prescribing so they are aware of our expertise, and actively signpost people to those opportunities.'

There is more on social prescribing in August's *OTnews* (page 16).

### Case study: getting carers in Essex more active

An OT-led organisation will start supporting carers to get active under a new project in Essex.

Social enterprise Sport For Confidence, based in Southend, has been commissioned by the council and NHS locally to deliver a number of workshops for local carers in a bid to help them, and the individuals they support have better access to opportunities to be more physically active.

A report conducted by Active Essex last year found that 67 per cent of adults in Southend-on-Sea are obese, and carers have been identified as a group particularly prone to inactivity and feeling socially isolated.

Lyndsey Barrett, senior occupational therapist and founder at Sport for Confidence, says:

'This project is about finding practical, workable, solutions which will lead to permanent behaviour change amongst participants. As part of the process, we will produce posters that highlight key learning from the workshops and suggestions moving forward. These posters will be shared with carers across the borough, extending the value of the workshops way beyond just those able to attend.'

Social enterprise Sport for Confidence delivers more than 900 interventions across six venues in Essex and Waltham Forest, working closely with GPs, community nursing groups and care homes.

