

Newnham Walk Surgery Patient Participation Group

Living with Depression

On 10th April the PPG organised an information session at the practice where Dr Pat Tate, GP and Psychotherapist was interviewed by Newnham Walk GP Dr Kate Townsend. Approximately 20 patients attended, and contributed questions and comments. It was a lively and helpful event.

Dr Tate described moderate depression as an illness that it is difficult to diagnose and difficult to care for, but that a GP will treat with a combination of medication or talking therapies.

Kate's well prepared questions established that there is no regular variation by age, sex, or culture. She asked what a relative might notice, and there was some discussion about how to encourage someone you care for to come to the GP and manage the condition.

Indicators for families and friends to look for include several items in the list below:

- Lack of pleasure
- Poor concentration
- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Feeling weepy

Often alcohol is used to self-medicate, and although initially it may seem to help, its' depressive impact makes the condition worse over time.

Physical symptoms such as tiredness and lack of energy can combine with a sense of shame for not being able to undertake normal activities. Dr Tate emphasised that depression is more than 'the blues' . The person experiences life with dampened emotions and energy, and loses optimism and a sense of perspective about real difficulties as well as worries.

Any sense of shame can make it hard to ask for help from the GP. She advised: "You can ask for a double appointment so you have time to tell the GP about your low mood. If, when you do go, you do not get a satisfactory hearing, go to another GP who may better understand what you are experiencing. "

What does help is sustaining a normal daily routine as far as is possible, taking some exercise, and increasing this by small amounts when you can. Family support, and sustaining responsibilities can help support the person through the depressive episode.

Although Newnham Walk no longer has access to surgery based talking therapies, the IAPT service (www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/IAPT-Cambridge) Is available through the Cambridge and Peterborough Foundation Trust.

Post natal depression services are described at www.cpft.nhs.uk/Downloads/DVD-Documents/Insight/Insight%20into%20Post-natal%20Depression%20.pdf

Talking treatments may include Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), counselling or psychotherapy. Medication works well for some patients. If a friend or family member is worried about the depressed person being at risk of self harm or suicide it is important to encourage them actively to seek some help through the GP. You will NOT 'put the idea into their head' by asking if the person is having thoughts about suicide.

Dr Tate and Dr Townsend were both warmly thanked for giving their time, and providing a very interesting and helpful event.

Patients who want to suggest other information events for the PPG to organise should leave a message in the suggestions box at the surgery.