

The Expert Patients Programme

The Expert Patients Programme (EPP) is a NHS-based training programme that provides opportunities to people who live with long-term chronic conditions to develop new skills to manage their condition better on a day-to-day basis. It aims to give people with long-term illness the confidence, skills and knowledge to manage their condition better and be more in control of their lives. Set up in 2002, the programme is based on research from the US and UK over the last two decades that shows that people living with a chronic condition are often in the best position to know what they need in managing their condition and that chronically ill patients who do become expert patients do better and have better quality of life. Expert patients are people living with a long-term health condition, who are able to take more control over their health by understanding and managing their conditions, leading to an improved quality of life.

The courses are organised by GPs surgeries and hospitals. In Newbury, they are organised by the Patient Liaison and Advice Service (PALS) at the West Berks Community Hospital. Each course is 6 weeks long with each session taking a few hours. The sessions are led by course tutors who are usually patients themselves who have done an EPP course in the past and then went on to train as a tutor. When you attend to course you are given a handbook that complements the topics discussed as well as giving more information on them.

Topics covered include:

- Making and using action plans.
- Relaxation and cognitive symptom management.
- Feedback and problem solving.
- Dealing with anger/fear/frustration and depression.
- Fitness and exercise.
- Better breathing.
- Nutrition.
- Communication, informing the health care team and working with your health professional.
- Medications and making treatment decisions.

I found the course useful despite many of the topics not being new to me as by that point I was already quite an expert patient. For someone who has not yet explored all the possible ways to get more control over their life as a chronically ill patient, I think the course could be invaluable.

Newbury PALS can be contacted via:

Judy McCulloch, PALS Manager, Newbury and Community PCT, West Berkshire Community Hospital, Benham Hill, London Rd, THATCHAM, RG18 3AS, Tel: 01635 273 325
Email: newbury.pals@berkshire.nhs.uk or judy.mcculloch@berkshire.nhs.uk

More information on the EPP is available at www.expertpatients.nhs.uk.

Author: Lindsey Middlemiss