

NHS Sheffield

Champions for Achieving Better Health in Sheffield project: Working with South Asian taxi drivers to prevent cardiovascular disease

NHS Sheffield wanted to act on some alarming statistics relating to health inequalities for black and minority ethnic groups:

- South Asian men are 50% more likely to die prematurely of cardiovascular disease (CVD) than the general population;
- the prevalence of stroke is 70% higher in South Asian men than the average;
- the risk of type 2 diabetes in South Asians is up to six times higher than in the white population.

The Pacesetters lead for NHS Sheffield, Permjeet Dhoot, came up with the idea of working with a group of taxi drivers, the vast majority of whom have a South Asian background. The sedentary nature of their work, coupled with late-night shifts, poor eating habits and high levels of smoking, makes them a particularly high risk group.

Actions taken

A half-day consultation with a number of drivers led to an agreement that a two-day training course on CVD would be offered to a core group of taxi drivers who would then become 'health champions' for the project.

Thirty-three South Asian taxi drivers have been trained as health champions and are now undertaking informal health promotion activity in their communities and, where appropriate, with passengers.

The two-day training included a screening of a DVD which aims to promote awareness of the risks of and strategies to prevent CVD among Asian communities, using a Bollywood-style film.

Some 142 taxi drivers have attended a comprehensive health screening and individualised lifestyle advice at the Sheffield City GP Health Centre, supported by AstraZeneca nurses. Follow-up clinics were held to provide advice and treatment where appropriate. Of the first cohort of 80 patients, 25% were at high risk of CVD; of the second cohort of 62 patients, over 50% had a body mass index greater than 27.5.

The project, known as CABS (Champions for Achieving Better Health in Sheffield), has received positive publicity in the local and national media, thereby further raising awareness of CVD risks for the South Asian community.





Outcomes

One of the most important outcomes has been the impact of CABS on the lives of the drivers who participated, and their informal work with others in the South Asian community to promote awareness of and action to prevent CVD.

Tahir Ali has been a taxi driver for 13 years. Since taking the course, Tahir has become much more interested in ensuring that his kids eat healthily and he talks to them about the importance of diet and exercise. His wife now walks the children to school and Tahir has joined a gym which he goes to four times a week. In addition to having an impact in his own home, Tahir has become a keen advocate for the project and its message among friends, neighbours and fellow taxi drivers. Of the project and his role as a 'champion' he says: 'I feel passionate. I want to share that knowledge.'

Another outcome of the project is an increased awareness of, and interest in, health promotion on the part of the Sheffield Taxi Trade Association which is now developing initiatives of its own to increase physical activity among its members.

In addition to this, the project has demonstrated the key role of the new polyclinics in tackling health inequalities across towns and cities.

A number of factors have been critical to the project's success:

- the quality of engagement and the sense of ownership this generated among the taxi drivers involved – the idea for screening sessions came from the drivers and was then acted on by NHS Sheffield; and
- the decision to pay the drivers a fee of £100 a day for their attendance at the training – this not only helped to compensate for lost earnings, but also demonstrated NHS Sheffield's recognition of the drivers' expertise and the value of their co-design of the project.

These first two factors in turn contributed to:

- the enthusiasm and interest of drivers in taking this work forward – a number of drivers now have personal leadership commitment to addressing health inequalities in the community; and
- the ability of the project lead to work both at a community level and across the hierarchy of the organisation – related to this is the way in which the project, from the outset, was positioned within the mainstream and had 'corporate buy-in' from NHS Sheffield.

The learning from the project is now being used to inform the roll out in Sheffield of the national vascular check programme, community CVD screening and weight management and healthy eating programmes.

For more information please contact:

Permjeet Dhoot
permjeet.dhoot@sheffieldpct.nhs.uk
0114 271 1499