

# The 'Sticking Plaster' Culture

Can integrated care cure the ills of a 'quick fix' culture? Massage therapist Ros Barresi considers a preventative approach

When we think of healthcare, we immediately associate it with GPs and nurses etc in primary care and doctors and nurses and other healthcare workers in hospitals in secondary care – basically, the NHS. There seems to be a culture in this country that we reach for the NHS every time our health is challenged. But, we must remember that we all have the power to look after ourselves, are more or less educated to understand what is good for us and what isn't. We understand the key lifestyle choices that can promote health, longevity and – ultimately – prevent death. But not everyone commits to this, as we know.

## Boost

If patients used the NHS as it should be used, it would help ease the financial burden. If they all take responsibility to look after themselves, they would be able to support their immune systems, becoming healthier and stronger – and complementary health care is a good way to boost them. With regular massage, reflexology or acupuncture, they can improve immunity in a subtle way and, therefore, be less reliant on GP surgeries in the long run. But many people are in a culture of a quick fix; they want a tablet or a visit to the GP to immediately remedy their ills. With many of the most commonly used antibiotics already becoming less and less effective, we grow ever more resistant and perhaps, practices need to encourage patients to take a fresh look at their health.

## Simple steps

Prevention is the key, rather than intervention,

but many relate to intervention because they fail to think ahead and often struggle to embrace a pattern of illness prevention by taking the simple steps of caring for themselves. The NHS is almost at bursting point – and this is only going to get worse. We have the ability to look ourselves with diet, exercise – and even with a more positive outlook on life.

Doctors are becoming harder to recruit in the UK, with one in three GPs retiring in five years, one in five GPs emigrating and one third of all visits deemed not necessary. Services need to be changed, offering a more integrated service where nurses can be hired and given the task of seeing patients that would save money, time and the precious commodity that is a GP's time. Other services would be helpful in this capacity, too, such as physiotherapists, counsellors, complementary therapists, nutritionists and so on.

On the facing page, I look at two health issues that occupy a lot of time in our practices but perhaps should be addressed elsewhere. If surgeries were allowed the time and resources to educate patients about lifestyle choices, we could reduce the load for our GPs – and the NHS. Perhaps it is now time to encourage patients to look elsewhere and rethink on whom they rely for a healthier, stronger – and longer – life.



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## Headaches

Headaches are a prime example of overuse of GP services. Some simple answers may be dehydration, hunger, skipping breakfast, eating too much food that has additives, too much caffeine and too much sugar – the list goes on. If we can eliminate these problems from our list – checking diet, lack of sleep, dehydration and stimulants – then we address other sources if the pain remains. By looking at patient habits, it relieves the workload of an already over-stretched GP practice for whom these health issues can create backlog.

## Backaches

The problems associated with backache also take up a lot of GP time. Many of us suffer from backache due to injuries from work and/or long-term issues that have never been rectified. Acupuncture, osteopathy and massage therapy are helpful in the management of pain and, if surgeries invested in some complementary therapies, it could reduce waiting list numbers, cut down on prescribed pain killers, slash the number of MRI and CT scan referrals, as well as reduce consultants' time. Exercise and relaxation are often underestimated as a solution and sometimes seemingly complex problems are solved with simple fixes.

