Welsh Local Government Association

The WLGA’s primary purposes are to promote a better local government, its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy. It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, with the 4 police authorities, 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities as associate members.

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National Exercise Referral Scheme

NERS was rolled out across Wales in 3 phases:

- Phase 1 began recruiting the first referrals in July 2007 with Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff, Conwy, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea;
- Phase 2 began in April 2008 with Flintshire, Denbighshire, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion; and
- Phase 3 began in January 2009 with Carmarthen, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr, Caerphilly, Wrexham, Powys, Gwynedd and Anglesey with Newport being the last area to become operational in March 2009.

Since the inception of the NERS new National Occupational Standards (NOS) have been developed at level 4 for chronic disease.

Level 4 accredited training has already been provided on:

- Phase IV cardiac rehabilitation instructor;
- respiratory disease instructor;
- postural stability instructor (falls prevention); and
- back care.

Protocols for Phase IV Cardiac Rehabilitation and Lung Disease are being implemented where there is a rehabilitation programme in operation and exercise professionals hold the necessary qualifications. Protocols for Falls Prevention are being piloted. Back Care protocols are being developed with the assistance of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists.
Overview

The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) is a Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) funded scheme which has been developed over the last 3 years to standardise exercise referral opportunities across all local authorities and local health boards in Wales. The Scheme targets clients who are at risk of developing chronic disease.

The principal aims of the Scheme

- to offer a high quality National Exercise Referral Scheme across Wales;
- to increase the long term adherence in physical activity of clients;
- to improve physical and mental health of clients; and
- to determine the effectiveness of the intervention in increasing activity levels and improving health.

Quality standards

All protocols used on the Scheme represent the best current known practice and meet with current national guidance. All exercise professionals operating the Scheme are trained to NVQ level 3, have a qualification that meets occupational standard D449 working with referred patients, and are appropriately insured. All protocols went through ethical approval, and the British Medical Association in Wales was consulted as part of the development of the Scheme.
The evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by the Cardiff Institute of Society, Health and Ethics, Cardiff University in partnership with the North Wales Clinical School, Cardiff University and the Institute of Medical and Social Care Research, Bangor University. The principal investigator was Dr. Simon Murphy. The study was reviewed by the Thames Valley Multi-centre Research Ethics Committee (reference: 06/MRE12/85) and received ethical clearance on 8 February 2007.

The study adopted a randomised controlled trial design and aimed to investigate whether self-reported physical activity (as well as depression and anxiety) at 12 months is different among those patients receiving an exercise referral programme compared to those receiving usual GP care. It also investigated the cost-effectiveness of the Scheme.

Main evaluation results from random control trial (RCT):

- RCT results proved effective in increasing activity for patients referred with CHD risk factors;
- RCT results proved a significant decrease in anxiety/depression for clients referred with mental health and CHD risk factors;
- clients adhering to the full intervention; were more likely to continue exercising independently’ and
- the analysis leads to a conclusion that NERS is 89% likely to be cost effective at just over £12,000 per QALY.

Please see hyperlink below for the evaluation results:

EVALUATION RESULTS ¹

¹ http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/social/latestresearch/exercise/;jsessionid=sypYMdKKJG3lcqwQCC1TybbZ1pK2fmt8p6gdG29Qyj7QLDJsyXf1671572730?lang=en
In April 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government Minister for Health and Social Services agreed that the NERS could expand to incorporate patients with chronic disease and also agreed to appoint a National Coordinator. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) appointed the National Exercise Referral Coordinator for Wales in August 2008 whose role consists of:

- monitoring the day to day running of the scheme;
- mentoring and supporting the coordinators and exercise professionals across Wales to improve and develop their schemes performance;
- commissioning training and developing standard protocols for each of these chronic conditions based on best practice from across the UK.

The National Exercise Referral Coordinator for Wales, Jeannie Wyatt-Williams is currently in discussion with the all Wales Cardiac Network group to develop an agreed pathway for these heart failure clients, where they are included either in Phase III Cardiac Rehabilitation or Pulmonary Rehab and have also received the education relating to lifestyle change.

In addition, Jeannie is in the process of commissioning the newly accredited Discovery Learning Level 4 Obesity course and the University of Edinburgh / Later Life Level 4 Stroke course, which will hopefully be delivered in Wales this autumn.

Training providers are developing more courses to meet the NOS and once these courses are accredited the exercise professionals will be able to gain the qualifications. Standard protocols will also be developed to deliver programmes for higher risk patients with other chronic disease such as mental health and cancer.

Jeannie recognised a need to offer training to meet the needs of exercise professionals who were having difficulty engaging with referrals suffering from mild/ moderate Mental Health. She developed a strong link with Hilary Westwood, a trainer from MIND Cymru, and commissioned a Mental Health awareness training day which has resulted in an improved take up of exercise. Hilary is working with Fitness Wales to develop a Level 4 Mental Health course.
Integration of Health and the National Exercise Referral Scheme in the Prevention and Management of Chronic Conditions

1. Primary Care
   - Obesity
   - Blood Pressure
   - Impaired Glucose Tolerance
   - Musculoskeletal
   - Depression

2. Health Education Programmes
   - Mental Health
   - Expert Patient Programme (EPP)
   - Condition Specific Education
   - Type II Diabetes

3. Rehab Programmes with Specific Exercise Component
   - Cardiac
   - Pulmonary
   - Falls
   - Heart Failure
   - Pain/Chronic Musculoskeletal
   - Stroke

Lifestyle behaviour change/advice intervention delivered by either health professional, lifestyle coach or NERS exercise professional

Generic Exercise Referral Level 3 Instructor

Specific Exercise Component Level 4 Instructor

Level 2 Instructor To deliver exit from NERS and entrance to

- Tai Chi
- Dance
- Gardening
- Swimming
- Nordic Walking
- Cycling
- Golf
- Gardening
- Gym Based
- Walking
- Yoga /Pilates
- Bowls
- Low Impact aerobics
- Walking

Mainstream Leisure & Community Activities

Jeannie Wyatt-Williams
Adapted from Bridgend’s Model by Melanie Andrews
ABMU Health Board