

GPs aim to reduce chronic lung disease in Sheffield

A group of GPs, serving nearly 125,000 patients in central Sheffield, are working together to reduce high rates of chronic disease in the city.

The Central Sheffield GP Consortium has looked at the prevalence of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) among its 27 practices and is now targeting resources to improve access to, and the quality of, health care services.

COPD covers chronic bronchitis, emphysema and smoking related lung disease and is the fifth biggest killer in the UK, responsible for 30,000 deaths a year – and rising.

The Consortium has the majority of inner city GP practices within Sheffield with high levels of deprivation, chronic disease and social need. Research has shown that despite suffering symptoms, many people don't seek help from their GP until the disease is well advanced.

Dr Maria Read said: "We know that COPD is far more common in deprived areas where people just tend to accept that you get shorter of breath and have a chronic cough as you get older.

"We need to be reaching these people early and getting the message across that a visit to their GP could make a huge difference to their quality of life and, potentially, to their length of life."

The Consortium is appointing specialist COPD nurses who will be working with practices to raise the standards of prevention and treatment available patients served by the group's 84 GPs.

And it is putting together a best practice guide for GPs and practice nurses on the management of COPD, including guidelines for early screening and referral to the community respiratory clinic based at Park Medical Centre.

Extra training is also available to primary health care teams, spreading best practice initiatives for identifying and helping COPD sufferers.

Dr Read added: "If caught early we can reverse some of the damage done by these awful diseases. There is a massive public education job to be done.

"Our aim is to raise the standard of COPD access and services across the Consortium. It is not just about helping patients to stop smoking, although this makes a huge difference for disease sufferers - or providing the right medication and treatment.

"GP practices should be seen as a wider resource for people; a place where, for example, they can get help to adopt a healthier lifestyle and get information on heating their homes, or applying for benefits"

Around 900,000 people in the UK suffer from COPD, which is 1.5 per cent of the population. However, this rate is higher in Sheffield with some practices in the Consortium reporting up to 4 per cent of their patients with chronic disease.