

Healthy start (2010)

Background

Healthy Start is a UK-wide government scheme to improve the health of pregnant women and families on benefits or low incomes. Healthy Start is an important scheme that can make a real difference to the healthy of pregnant women, new mothers and very young children in low-income and disadvantaged families. As well as providing vouchers towards the cost of basic foods, the scheme offers specially designed vitamin supplements free of charge. The Healthy Start vitamins meet recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) with regard to supplementation.

Methods

Following a letter received from the Director of Public Health in December 2009 asking for Healthy Start action plans to be submitted to address the poor rate of vitamin uptake, Telford and Wrekin set up a working party. Members of this group included:-

- Breastfeeding Coordinator (commissioning)
- Children's and families provider manager
- Medicines management
- Midwifery management
- Children centre representative
- Health improvement practitioner

It was felt that access and availability to vitamins was limited through baby clinics and although there had been some improvement in distribution of children's vitamins, but not women's tablets, the service could be improved to meet the targets set by the DOH.

A decision was made to approach pharmacies to help deliver vitamins through their outlets.

A letter was sent out via medicines management explaining Healthy Start and asking for their help. Over half of the pharmacies agreed to take part. A further letter was sent out with a list of the pharmacies who had agreed which prompted all but 3 pharmacies to come on board, with only one now not involved.

Simple protocols were set in place

- Introductory packs were made up with briefing sheets, promotional material and point of sale packs
- Healthy Start training was delivered to all pharmacies and protocols to audit the service were informed.

- All health visitors/midwifery and children's centre staff were given letters listing all pharmacies offering Healthy Start vitamins with a five week lead into service change, and all area managers of services have been tasked to make sure all staff have had training on Healthy Start to enable a proactive workforce signposting women effectively.
- Press coverage

Issues

- Transport was an issue. It was decided to use existing staff to deliver vitamins to pharmacies in the first instance. This was felt to offer a service that will not only get over the transport problem but will build up rapport with pharmacies and to answer questions and audit advertisement of service within participating pharmacies.
- Healthy Start vitamins are not available at present to non qualifying members of the public. Pharmacies will only be exchanging vitamins for vouchers. Pharmacies have been offered vitamins to purchase from the PCT and sell themselves at a 10% profit as priced by the Department of Health. None as yet have taken up this offer.

Positive benefits for pharmacies

- Increased footfall in pharmacies
- In an environment of commissioning and providing, pharmacies see this as an opportunity to prove they can be effective in delivering services
- Improved relationships between NHS staff and pharmacies.

Evaluation

- It is too early to report progress but all pathways and parties are enthusiastic and keen to make a positive contribution and launch date went ahead on schedule on the 1st July 2010 and the first week looked positive.
- Weekly stock takes are faxed to medicines management to audit uptake of service.
- Review date in early October has been set to evaluate first quarter.

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