

Scottish Parliament, Health and Sport Committee: Social Prescribing of Physical Activity and Sport Inquiry

BDA Scotland Board Response

BDA Scotland Board welcomes the Scottish Government Health and Sport Committee's inquiry into social prescribing as a way to improve health and well-being of the nation. However, we consider social prescribing should not be restricted to physical activity and sport only but should include a wider position on health and well-being, including diet and nutrition. For many conditions, diet, rather than physical activity, is going to be the most effective form of treatment, indeed for conditions such as obesity it is well recognised that dietary change is more important than physical activity. Also important are social and mental health interventions, designed to tackle loneliness, isolation or anxiety which should be considered, e.g. day centres and lunch clubs. We would be concerned that a focus on physical activity for social prescribing is likely to exclude those for whom increasing exercise is an unrealistic or unhelpful expectation (such as the very elderly or those that are severely obese).

BDA Scotland Board acknowledges the need to shift from reactive, hospital-based treatment of acute conditions to more preventative and community-based services. Recognising that health and well-being is determined primarily by a range of social, economic and environmental factors, and the management of long-term conditions requires individuals to accommodate a change in health into their lifestyle, social prescribing is widely advocated as one of the ways in which NHS Scotland services can be made more sustainable. It provides a non-medical referral option for issues involving lifestyle and wellbeing and can operate alongside existing treatments.

BDA Scotland Board recommends consideration is given to opportunities for dietitians to support models of care that focus on prevention. Dietitians can support organisations, communities and the public in many settings to reduce confusion about food and diet. Providing a cost-effective professional resource, Dietitians have the ideal skill mix to develop high quality training and education on diet and nutrition enabling others to deliver behaviour change and weight management interventions. Through dietetic led practical community food skills programmes, Dietitians work with people from disadvantaged communities to help them develop the knowledge and skills to buy, prepare and cook healthy, affordable food for themselves and their families. The increasing prevalence of obesity amongst adults and children is a major public health challenge. Diet is the cornerstone for effective weight management. Dietitians use family approaches in addition to structured individual advice to enable sustained changes to diet and lifestyle. BDA Scotland Board emphasises the need for dietetic services to be reinforced and redesigned so that these opportunities can be realised and maximised. We need to be supported to enable us to reshape our contribution to reflect a different pattern of service, with the balance of investment shifting from acute care to primary and community care.

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) recently launched 'Driving Forward Social Prescribing, A Framework for Allied Health Professionals'. <https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/resources/ahp-social-prescribing-frameworks.html> BDA Scotland Board recommends consideration is given to the RSPH framework in the development of social prescribing to improve health and well-being in Scotland. The framework describes how Allied Health Professionals (including dietitians) provide a wide range of services that can be linked into social prescribing schemes. Examples provided include cooking groups and healthy eating advice by dietitians. The framework also describes how Allied Health Professionals (including Dietitians) can work with link workers as well as community groups to build capacity, skills and expertise.

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