

Healthy Active Minds GP Testimonials

Dr Helen Barker, GP

Dear Sam,

Thank you for your email. I am very sorry to hear that we are likely to lose yet another service which has been fundamental to holistic patient care over recent years and would appreciate it if you could forward my email to the appropriate people. This is a real kick in the teeth given we have already lost the Fit for Health service in recent months. This seems extremely shortsighted, prioritising immediate budget concerns above long term value and patient benefit.

Psychiatric services in Edinburgh are under more pressure than they have ever been due to increasing demand and significant staff shortages. We have lost third sector counselling services over recent years and options for non-medical based input for mild to moderate mental health problems are fast diminishing. We know exercise and activity is beneficial for depression and anxiety. Some studies suggest activity programmes are actually more effective than antidepressant treatment, as well as providing much longer-term benefit.

I have used Healthy Active Minds instead of starting medication for some patients. In others I have referred to augment medication. Many patients have shown considerable improvement and benefit from the programme both in terms of initial improvement and perhaps even more importantly, sustained improvement. Clearly this also benefits their physical health.

General practitioners are criticised for perceived overprescribing of antidepressant medication but what choice do we have if other avenues are no longer available? Losing this service will increase patient demand for GP contact, increase medicalisation of subclinical mental health problems and be overall detrimental to patient care.

*Kind regards,
Dr Helen Barker, GP*

Dr David Millar, GP

As a GP at a predominantly student practice, this is a vital service to be able to refer to. There is extensive evidence that exercise impacts positively on mental and physical health. It is a useful tool to have at our disposal and reduces the rates of prescribing antidepressant medication to young people.

Dr David Millar

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Dr Rachel Phillips, GP

Dear Sam

I am very sad to hear this news and am very happy to write this email in support. I find being able to refer people to Healthy Active minds is totally invaluable as a full time GP who sees many folk struggling with their mental health. It's very difficult for folk already low and anxious to start exercising and being able to offer them a 3-month trial seems to be a very effective motivator (esp. to those who are not in the habit of exercising) and helps consolidate our message of self help and the role that exercise can play.

My patients tend to be pleasantly surprised and pleased with the offer, and I have had great feedback from patients.

Not having this option will make me feel like I have less options and interventions that I can offer and build rapport with.

At a time when we are trying to promote exercise and health living and people taking agency for their own health and not solely rely on medication which can have harms it seems very short sighted to stop funding this. It is a really effective way to help people initiate new and healthy habits. The more patients we get engaging in regular exercise surely the less work for the NHS and the more we grow a general awareness of the need for regular activity.

Not having the healthy active minds option will make it harder to 'sell' exercise as a way to help your own mental health and will mean less people get started on what often becomes a helpful lifetime habit. It will also make my job harder – it is a tough job seeing people with mental health problems every day and the more safe and healthy tools we have to offer people and promote their own sense of agency the better!

I wish you well in advocating for this. I use Healthy Active Minds all the time and it will be a great loss not to have it as a management option and a way of consolidating positive health messages and promoting behavioural change.

Yours,

Dr Rachel Phillips GP