



Small steps to a healthier nation: providing and delivering health information across Wales

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Abstract:

This practice based paper reflects on the role of the Health Promotion Library in managing the Health Challenge Wales leaflet order-line 0845 606 4050.

It tells the story of this development from our initial involvement with, and support for Health Challenge Wales which began in 2004, to the current situation where we manage and deliver the Health Challenge Wales leaflet order-line which between January and June 2010 supplied more than 188,309 leaflets to 501 organisations and individuals across Wales.

Reflecting on our practice, the paper explores the opportunities managing such as service offers, as well as the challenges which have to be overcome to deliver a successful service to customers. Existing systems in place to measure performance and evaluate the usefulness of the service based on customer feedback are discussed. Future plans to gather more robust evidence of effectiveness to show positive outcomes and case studies is also examined.

Introduction

Health is a devolved responsibility for the Welsh Assembly Government which came into existence in 1999. Policy and strategy documents from the Government emphasise that “the health of the nation is not just the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government and the NHS. Everyone has a part to play in improving health in Wales: health is everybody’s business.” (1)

A further review in 2003 of health and social care in Wales reinforced this idea of health being a “shared responsibility of organisations and individuals”, and recommended that

greater emphasis should be placed on preventing ill health, to free up health services to treat unavoidable disease. (2)

Current policy objectives for public health are set in a framework 'Our Healthy Future' which reinforces this emphasis on a "shared responsibility." It further states that "Our Healthy Future is about the health of the whole community. A lot of good can be achieved by working together." (3)

Health Challenge Wales

Health Challenge Wales was set up by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2004 to help meet these overarching policy aims.

Health Challenge Wales encourages individuals and organisations to "share responsibility for health" by "taking small steps to become healthier." (4)

A key part of this campaign from the very start was the "signposting of members of the public and organisations to information or activities to help improve their own health." (5)

A range of leaflets on healthy lifestyles, including smoking, alcohol, healthy eating, exercise as well as information on immunisation were made available in support of the initiative.

Health Promotion Library

With this obvious emphasis on information provision, the Health Promotion Library realised that there was a role for our service in this initiative, and that we should contribute in some way to achieving its objectives.

The Health Promotion Library was set up in 1989 as a departmental library supporting an all Wales NHS body Health Promotion Wales. Since its establishment, the library developed its remit to support professionals across Wales involved in health promotion, and membership was extended to anyone in Wales including the general public.

In 1999, the Library as part of Health Promotion Wales transferred to the Welsh Assembly Government, and joined the Department for Public Health and Health Professionals.

In response to these organisational changes, the library expanded both its collections and the services provided to customers to meet new demands for information in all areas of public health.

Tailored services have been developed and these are currently provided for health professionals and policy officials in the department led by the Chief Medical Officer for Wales.

Alongside these tailored services, the Library's national role supporting anyone involved or interested in public health, whether this is for their work, training, research, or for individuals who want to keep themselves or their families healthy has continued to develop.

The library is the only specialised public health service in Wales offering free membership and access to services for anyone in Wales. A commitment to working with others to provide

seamless services to customers has led to informal partnerships with libraries in all sectors, as well as with research networks, voluntary and statutory organisations. (6)

Health Promotion Library and Health Challenge Wales

The library's initial role in working with Health Challenge Wales focused on marketing to help raise awareness with professionals and the public.

Regular updates about Health Challenge were featured in the public health newsletter, and direct marketing of Health Challenge merchandise and leaflets were part of our displays at conferences and events across Wales. We also facilitated partnerships between public libraries and Health Challenge Wales as an obvious outlet for making health leaflets available to the public.

We realised however that we could do more, and that we should be more actively involved in managing a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of health information. The rationale for this development was based not only on our professional judgement, but also from consistent customer demand for health leaflets which they expected the library to be providing.

We therefore seized the opportunity to take on the management of the Health Challenge Wales leaflet order-line in 2008 when we were able to negotiate this extended role with our Health Challenge Wales colleagues.

We felt that adding this service to our existing core library services would not only satisfy existing customer demands, but would also help the library target services to a potential customer group we found it difficult to engage – the general public.

Developing the Leaflet Order-line

Since taking on this service in January 2008, we have implemented a number of changes to make it easier for customers to find out about the health leaflets available to them, and for us to deliver services to consistent quality standards.

To increase uptake of the leaflets we actively market these, not only to general public health conferences, but also to specific events where we know health leaflets are likely to be particularly relevant. Our evaluation of these events shows a high demand for the leaflets.

It soon also became obvious that customers were not aware of the full range of the leaflets available from the service, and that a full list of leaflets was not routinely sent out. A bilingual list was produced, which is kept up-to-date and is sent to all customers who place an order with us as a standard practice.

As we anticipated, many of the customers to the leaflet order-line were not aware of the Health Promotion Library and its services. This offered us a good marketing opportunity. Basic information about the library is therefore part of the ordering process, and all potential new members are sent a follow up marketing membership letter. As a result more than 50 new members have joined the library, including many from groups who would not otherwise have contacted a library service.

Quality standards and improved ordering processes

To make it clear to customers that the service is being delivered to quality standards, we proactively tell them:

- When they can expect their order to be delivered. The standard delivery is within 5 working days, but if this does not meet the needs of the customer we make sure we meet their deadlines.
- Service opening hours and how they can leave an order outside of these times.
- Our results against these targets.
- Positive and negative feedback and what we will do if something has gone wrong.

This approach has been commended as an example of excellent customer practice in our Customer Service Excellence assessment in 2009, and we know from customers that they find this helpful. (7)

We have also streamlined the order process, to make sure we collect all the information we need from customers as they place an order with us, and using an online form we can inform them of any likely delay if the items they need are low in stock, or about to be reprinted.

Behind the scenes a new order process along with checking and tracking is in place with the distribution company. Weekly stock reports are checked to identify any discrepancies in the numbers of leaflets held based on orders taken, and any problems are immediately reported. Regular meetings with the company and the Welsh Assembly Government's print procurement manager have resulted in a much improved service as part of this contract.

Challenges

There are many challenges in running a hands on delivery service, not least of which is keeping up with the demand for the leaflets.

Keeping accurate records of customer orders and their contact details is also essential, something which can pose difficulties if these are left on the answer-phone particularly if the details are in Welsh!

Re-contacting some customers if there is a query with their order is also time-consuming, as many work with patients in the NHS and cannot be contacted during working hours. So it is doubly important to take all contact details when the initial order is placed, as it may be easier to re-contact customers by email.

Leaflets with similar titles can be confusing to both customers and staff, and to overcome this our order form now has a product code to identify each leaflet. We also keep at least one copy of all leaflets so that we can check them in case of queries.

Queries for leaflets which we don't stock, and in 'other' languages such as Russian, Latvian, Mandarin are often received. We use all ways to find out about new leaflets being produced, or other health campaigns which are happening so that we have information readily available. But you have to be proactive about this, as many colleagues do not think about keeping you informed, and often the first time you hear about something new is when you take a telephone call! This is not good service delivery!

If we do receive requests for health leaflets which are not part of our service, we refer customers on to other relevant services which we also do for information in other languages.

Evaluation and monitoring

We monitor all orders handled and there is a system in place to check the orders for accuracy and deal with any problems to minimise any delay in delivery.

Monthly statistics are kept so that we know:

- The total number of enquiries
- The total number of leaflets distributed
- The top twenty most popular leaflets
- The percentage uptake by area in Wales
- The percentage uptake by organisations and individuals
- How customers found out about the service whether this was by recommendation, repeat business or via the Internet.

A monthly statistical report is provided to key stakeholders, and is also published for all existing and potential customers in the public health newsletter.

Future plans

We already know from qualitative informal feedback from customers that they value the service provided, and find the leaflets useful to support health promotion campaigns, or for use in consultation with patients.

We aim to get more robust evidence to support this, and really demonstrate the value of what we do. So in the next few months we will be doing a more formal customer survey to find out.

We will be contacting customers who have used the service recently by either telephone or email and asking for more information about their satisfaction with the service, usefulness of the leaflets and how they are being used.

We want to be able to have case studies and evidence of these working in practice, as well as any suggestions or ideas as to how we can make further improvements.

We will feedback results to stakeholders as well as to all customers in the newsletter and on our web site.

Conclusion

Managing this leaflet order-line has certainly been a 'Challenge' for a small library team, but it has huge benefits, not least of which is the opportunities it gives for marketing services to customers we would not otherwise reach.

We have seen not only increases in library membership numbers, but also enquiries to our general library service, which are the direct result of receiving information about the library as part of our follow up marketing.

We are on the front-line of providing 'health information for all' and this opens doors which we know would otherwise be firmly closed.

So if you have the chance to get involved in a similar initiative, our advice would definitely be 'Go for It'!

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