



Speakers' Corner - Dr Ed Rosen from the Lambeth GP Food Co-op

Ed Rosen is the project director for the Lambeth GP Food Co-op. He has previously worked in a number of patient engagement projects including providing skilled facilitation for patient participation groups across AT Medics as Director of Patient Experience, Engagement & Community Participation. He was also the principal lecturer at the Faculty of Health and Social Care for London South Bank University.

The Lambeth GP Food Co-op is a co-operative of patients, doctors, nurses and local residents. We build gardens in GP surgeries to help patients to learn how to grow food. In 2013 with funding from Lambeth Council matched by NHS Lambeth CCG, we began our work with three GP partner surgeries, winning Best Sustainable Food Initiative in the NHS awarded by Public Health England and NHS Sustainability in that same year. Since then we have worked in partnership with 11 surgeries across the borough enabling their patients to make new friends, learn how to grow fruit and vegetables and have a share in their own community cooperative. We believe that we are the first community led co-operative working in and for the NHS, but we encourage others to replicate our model of community engagement elsewhere.

One of our aims is to develop collaborative relationships with all staff in the practice. Engaging with the whole surgery workforce is essential if the project is to become integrated into organisational culture. Although active support from GPs is crucial in helping us to gain recognition and legitimacy across the organisation, it is the positive support, help and understanding from front line reception and administrative staff that make our work successful. They are often informal gatekeepers in the organisation and occupy important roles in the flow of information to and from patients. Involving practice managers and staff in the day-to-day management of the co-operative has built up strong relationships with them.

As one of our main aims is to reach out to patients with long term health conditions, many of whom are socially isolated, we rely on practice staff to help identify patients who might benefit from joining a gardening group.

The IT/admin lead at one Lambeth GP surgery is the main point of contact for the Lambeth GP Food Co-op on site. Each week he monitors patient participation in the gardening group which is useful in maintaining an overview of numbers attending a weekly session. He collects feedback from patients on their experience from gardening especially how it has contributed to improvements in their personal health and wellbeing. One participant said:

"I heartily recommend joining the [Lambeth GP Food Co-op], whether it's for the pleasure of growing your own fresh produce, for taking up an active hobby, or simply to combat social isolation. I think these schemes can only benefit both individuals and communities."

The recently published King's Fund Report : Gardens and Health : Implications for Policy and Practice (May 2016), draws attention to the significant benefits to many patients from becoming involved in gardening activity as a social experience. There are real benefits not just because gardening is good for you, but the human contact with other people, many of whom are managing one or more long term health conditions, helps reduce the isolation and loneliness that many of our patients are struggling with in their lives.

We don't just grow food in GP surgeries. Our partnership with Medirest at King's College Hospital includes a monthly stall in the Spice of Life restaurant where we sell locally grown food to NHS staff, patients and their families. This is a good example of patient grown food being used to feed hospital patients (and others), with benefits all round. The money we earn from these sales, although modest, is re-invested in the future growth and development of our co-operative as a social business.

So what of the future? We are looking to expand our activities both across the borough and beyond. We need more land for growing, some of this will be at GP surgeries and some from new land brought into use from outside the borough. We would like to find people who are interested in creating an NHS Farm with us. If you would like to help the Lambeth GP Food Co-op or would like to find out more or you would like to build your own GP Food Co-op we'd like to hear from you. Contact us at gpfoodcoop@gmail.com or visit our website www.lgpfc.co.uk.

