

Press release – 23rd January, 2018

Sunderland NHS service takes first steps to encourage Metro users to walk a stop or two



An NHS health service for people in Sunderland with conditions affecting their muscles, bones and joints is hoping its research could encourage Metro users to get more exercise by ‘walking a stop or two’.

The Sunderland Integrated Musculoskeletal Service (SIMS) is provided by South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts and works closely with NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group. With the co-operation of Metro operators Nexus, they asked passengers about their exercise regime, including how much they did and the reasons for not achieving the NHS recommended levels for good health and wellbeing and whether 'walking a stop or two' during a journey or two a week would enable them to achieve the NHS's recommended amount of exercise.

The research was carried out by Newcastle University medical student Alisdair Love, while he was on placement with SIMS. A poster highlighting the project was shown at the British Association of Sports and Exercise Medicine's international conference in Bath where it was awarded a prize.

Consultant in Sports and Exercise Medicine Dr Glen Rae said: "We actively seek and participate in research opportunities, as well as other improvement initiatives to ensure the best possible care informed by current best practice is available to our patients.

"Regular exercise, in combination with a well-balanced diet, is the best way to keep all parts of your musculoskeletal system strong and healthy so we were delighted to support this latest public-health focused research project looking at improving uptake of exercise in the region. Many of the respondents in our questionnaire highlighted time pressures as the reason for not getting enough exercise. Walking a stop or two during one or two Metro journeys a week is a simple way to help them to achieve the recommended levels without impacting too much on their working day."

Alisdair added: "With about 38 million passenger journeys a year on the Metro, there is a huge opportunity to encourage large numbers of people to increase their activity levels by active commuting. The production of a 'walking Metro map' could be a great tool to not only raise awareness of this but also the public health recommendations on physical activity."

NHS guidelines for adults aged 19-64 to stay healthy are to try to be active daily and do at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, such as cycling or brisk walking every week, and strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all the major muscles (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms).

South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts have been working together as part of the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group strategic alliance since March 2016. A joint executive management team has been in place since November 2016 and the vision is to develop high quality healthcare services that will benefit local communities for many years to come.

SIMS is a shining example of the benefits for patients that can be achieved through joint working between both Trusts. It was established before the Healthcare Group - in October 2015 - for people aged over 16 living in Sunderland and encompasses primary and secondary care services, offering patients seamless care in a single pathway.

Clinics are held in hospital at Sunderland Royal and in the community at Grindon Lane, Bunny Hill, Washington and Houghton Primary Care Centres, Park Lane Practice and Southwick Health Centre. The team comprises specialist physiotherapists, GPs with a Special Interest in Musculoskeletal conditions, and a Consultant in Sports and Exercise Medicine, with expertise in conditions affecting mobility, function and wellbeing. They offer comprehensive assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal conditions affecting bones, joints, spine, soft tissue, muscles or ligaments and are able to arrange diagnostic tests such as x-rays and MRI. They also arrange referral and access to secondary care services such as Orthopaedics, Rheumatology and pain management, as well as health and wellbeing services.

Dr Rae added; "We provide patients with relevant information and assistance on the best way to manage and/or improve their condition and involve them in all decisions regarding their care and welfare. Following referral from their GP, we identify the appropriate member of our team or refer to another more appropriate service and

arrange an appointment, with a choice of a number of convenient locations across Sunderland.”

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Photo caption: Newcastle University medical student Alisdair Love, left, and Consultant in Sports and Exercise Medicine Dr Glen Rae

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