**North East Leads on Painkiller Reduction**

NHS Sunderland CCG and NHS County Durham CCG have reduced their high dose opioid pain medication prescriptions by 34% and 17% (respectively), ahead of new NICE guidelines due to be released in January 2021.

The CCGs recognised that the high levels of opioid use were a serious concern and developed the PainkillersDontExist.com campaign to raise awareness of the problems linked with long-term opioid pain medication.

The campaign originally launched in October 2019 in Sunderland CCG and in March 2020 in County Durham CCG and this Autumn the CCGs continue to raise awareness of the dangers associated with long-term use of opioid pain medication.

The campaign supports medical professionals including GPs and pharmacists to have the difficult conversations with patients and advise how to reduce and stop medications safely.  It also targets individuals and their family and friends to recognise if opioid painkillers like Codeine and Tramadol are a problem.  ’Painkillers Don’t Exist’ builds on previous work done by the CCGs to educate and provide resources to support prescribers when reducing pain medication.

Ewan Maule, head of medicines optimisation in Sunderland, said: “Side effects like dependence and addiction, personality change, drowsiness and mood swings are all indicators that individuals need to be aware of and we would urge people to discuss their approach to long term pain management with their GP surgery.

“We understand that pain management is not a one-size-fits all approach. Simply prescribing opioid painkillers to mask the symptom of pain is no longer the sole method used to treat long term, persistent pain.”

Together with individuals, health professionals are increasingly taking an holistic approach and advising use of alternative techniques that can be beneficial, including practises like physiotherapy, yoga and meditation.

Dr Rory MacKinnon of GP Partner at Bridge View Medical Group, Southwick added: “We now know that our bodies change the way they react to pain over time. Three months is a good rule of thumb, when it comes to recognising acute over persistent pain. At this point, and often earlier, opioid medication, simply does not achieve sufficient pain relief. The answer is rarely to simply increase the dose. We want to work together with our patients to effectively manage pain, with opioid pain medication restricted to when it will be effective.”

 “This is a complex, long standing and multifaceted problem and solutions to address opioid dependency must be complemented by development and funding of other evidence-based treatments and interventions.”

Anyone who is affected by opioid pain medication and interested in reducing their doses, is encouraged to discuss their long term pan management with a health professional like a nurse practitioner, GP or pharmacist or visit www.painkillersdontexist.com for further information.

Maule finished: “We continue to work with our medical colleagues across Sunderland, County Durham and the whole of the North East to reduce prescriptions of opioid pain medication where appropriate and safe to do so.”

The campaign offers targeted, hard-hitting social media messages along with posters and advice cards, roadside billboards, local stories and a new [**website**](http://pdestage.wpengine.com/) to provide general and information and to start signposting people to support.

Ends