

Treating multiple health conditions in a single patient supported by a unique online self-management resource

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Credit: University of Manchester

New guidelines issued by the National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) for managing patients with more than one long-term

condition recommend a tailored approach to patient care focused on individual preferences, needs and priorities.

To coincide with the guidelines, a new online resource has been launched to help patients with several long term conditions – multimorbidity – not only self-manage their treatment approaches across their multiple conditions but help influence the tailored nature of treatment required by NICE in the new guidelines.

The healthtalk.org "living with multiple health problems" section presents patients' experiences of coping with the complexities of multiple illnesses; users of the website are able to access more than 200 extracts in video, audio or written format from interviews with real patients discussing various aspects of living with multimorbidity as well as advice on self-management of treatments and juggling all the required medication across multiple conditions.

It is estimated that approximately one quarter of the UK population are living with two or more health conditions – including diabetes, arthritis and heart disease – and this figure is set to rise as the population ages.

The main challenges facing patients with multiple conditions are managing sometimes conflicting treatments, deciding what to prioritise, coordinating the care received from different professionals and generally overcoming sometimes poor communication from those professionals.

Communication is the key to managing multimorbidity, according to Dr Gavin Daker-White, Research Fellow at The University of Manchester's School of Health Sciences who led the analysis of the interviews for the web resource.

"Getting a new diagnosis on top of existing diseases can be a bit of blow. Patients will quite likely be asking themselves – and their healthcare

providers – what does it all mean now and how am I going to cope?

"healthtalk.org aims to take users on a person-based journey through the issues of multimorbidity; users can see and hear 38 people sharing their stories about the effects of health problems on their lives and their experiences of using health services. They talk about how they deal with the challenges brought by multiple health problems, for example by prioritising which health problem is the most important. They talk about where the health service has worked well for them and where it hasn't. Their advice for other patients and recommendations for improving care are offered – along with advice on taking control of their multiple medicines and other treatments."

Development of the multimorbidity section was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), and is part of the wider healthtalk.org website. healthtalk.org (formerly dipex then healthtalkonline and youthhealthtalk) was created in 2001 by Oxford GP Dr Ann McPherson CBE and Dr Andrew Herxheimer after their own experiences of illness. Ann had been diagnosed with breast cancer and although she knew about the medical side, couldn't find anyone to talk to about what it was really like to have the disease. This, and Andrew's experience of knee replacement surgery, prompted them to come up with the innovative idea of a patient experience website.

The website has sections on more than 90 diseases, conditions and other health issues – all sharing experiences in video, audio or written format from people affected by each individual illness or health issue. Healthtalk.org is primarily a resource for patients, their families and friends, but is also valuable in educating [health](#) and social care professionals about patient perspectives of illness.

Provided by University of Manchester

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