

FEATURE

GP practice finds new way to fight loneliness

A 'health film club' is helping to combat loneliness and improve patients' wellbeing

A Suffolk healthcare team has adopted a novel way of combating loneliness in the community - with the invention of a 'health film club'.

Saxmundham Health, based at Lamsale Meadow, showed its fifth film on Sunday at the Fromus Centre in Saxmundham with its largest audience to date for Kenneth Branagh's masterpiece, 'Belfast'.

Dr John Havard, a GP at the practice, said the scheme was designed to combat loneliness which, he said, makes strokes and heart attacks 30 per cent more likely.

'Your readers will not realise that loneliness is as important a risk factor as smoking 10 cigarettes a day,' he said. 'This is what we are doing about it.'

The film club is run by the Patient Participation Group in association with Saxmundham Health and is an opportunity for patients, primarily who live alone, to get out and enjoy a film with tea with cakes and some company afterwards.

Patients without transport or access to lifts are welcome and lifts are organised to and fro internally.

The practice's electric car has proved very useful in this - it was bought for visits and drug deliveries to housebound patients - but it is not used on Sundays, making it a perfect helper for the film club.

Volunteer members were on hand to distribute the tea and cake.

Abbie Pallant, who works in the care navigation team, said: 'It is so nice to see the patients we speak to on the

phone and to have the opportunity to put names to faces.'

Emma, who leads the admin team at Saxmundham Health, said: 'I spend most of my time typing about patients and taking calls from them so it is great to meet some of them. It helps me appreciate that my work is about real people and real problems and seeing some of the patients adds purpose.'

One of the patients, John Appleton, who lives alone, has attended all five films.

'I still drive so I bring down several of my neighbours and we look forward to it. Much more comfortable that the old thre'pennies were in the old days!' he said.

Simon Wilks, Deputy Chairman of the Patient

Participation Group, said:

'It is great to have a regular event that brings people together - there is always a lot of chat before and after the film and we really hope the Film Club is a long term fixture.'

Dr John Havard explained that there were costs for hiring the hall, licensing charges and refreshments but these were all possible - 'It is important to make these events free to attend. We hope this will be a springboard for other community activities as isolation is a real health risk and we all need to do what we can to alleviate it,' he said.

The next film has not yet been decided on but suggestions were sought from the audience. The exit poll put 'High Noon' in pole position.

Details of the next showing will be published at the surgery and on the practice website, saxmundhamhealth.nhs.uk



Another successful night for Saxmundham Health Film Club



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Loneliness

Social isolation has been associated with around a 50% increased risk of dementia.

Poor social relationships (characterised by social isolation or loneliness) have been associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke. Loneliness is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide.

Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly four times increased risk of death, a 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and a 57 per cent increased risk of emergency department visits.

Information provided by Dr John Havard