

## **My Learning Story: Stephen Cairns, Physiotherapy Assistant Practitioner**

As a member of the NHS Lothian community physiotherapy team Stephen works with many frail and vulnerable patients.

Much of his role involves assessing people for walking aids and he also helps with hip and knee replacement rehab and with falls prevention exercises.

Stephen's support can make all the difference – keeping people mobile, safe and independent.

And thanks to a Professional Development Award (PDA) he has been able to help make substantial improvements to his team's service.

Stephen is a sports science graduate from Edinburgh University who became an HCSW because he wanted to be involved in patient care. He went from being a Band 3 technical instructor to his current Band 4 role three years ago.

In 2016 Stephen further developed his expertise by taking the one-year part-time distance learning Health and Social Care Promoting Professional Practice PDA which had four modules.

He said: "I particularly liked the last module which was in quality improvement and involved finding an area of improvement in my current team. What we did was to introduce a self-referral method for patients to be assessed for walking aids in our physio at home team."

The outcomes were impressive. If a patient, or carer, thought a walking aid was needed they could fill in a simple form and get a timely home assessment rather than having to see a GP before being referred on.

The number of referrals seen by the team shot up from 17% to 83%, GP time was freed up for other tasks and patients received help sooner.

### **Putting patients in control**

A major benefit of the self-referral scheme is that it puts patients in charge of their own situation.

It also cut the time between when a patient asked for help and actually got it. Delays and uncertainty had sometimes meant they bought their own walking aids, or that they were no longer needed by the time the equipment was made available.

Stephen said: "We've now adopted a more person-centred approach, which means that the patient is in complete control of the referral and they are able to tell us exactly what they are after and what their needs are."

When a member of the team visits a patient they already have a good idea of they are likely to need and take the appropriate walking aid with them. The result is that they can do an assessment and provide the right equipment on the spot.

### **Contributing to the team**

According to Stephen every member of a team can contribute to service improvement if they are given the chance.

And the changes themselves don't have to be huge to have a very real impact on staff

and the experience of patients.

Having the opportunity to carry out a project of his own allowed Stephen to raise efficiency and save time all round.

He said: "I was the main person doing the assessments so it was great being involved with deciding how the service should be delivered.

"I felt quite rewarded; it's nice to have had a positive influence on the service you work in and to help create a better and more efficient way for patients to refer themselves.

"Being able to contribute to improving service quality made me feel valued as part of the team. It also allowed me to push my skills and abilities a wee bit further than before."

What Stephen gained:

- Extra professional skills and knowledge
- A Professional Development Award in Health and Social Care
- The chance to shape the service he delivered.