

Service principles for people living with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain

About:

These draft principles are based on the insights generated through the Q Lab's research into how care can be improved for people with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain. A number of activities contributed towards the research, including lived experience interviews. The principles highlight what is important to an individual who has mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain, and the things that matter when considering how best to support their health and care.

Testing and developing:

The aim is to test whether these can be developed into 'service principles' that can support the design and delivery of services, or for the people receiving the service to help them know what to expect, or to demand, of the people and services supporting their health and care.

Audiences:

Three potential audiences have been identified for these principles:

1. People designing a service for people with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain.
2. People delivering services to people with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain.
3. People with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain who are currently receiving support from a health service.

Testing the draft principles

Currently seven key principles have been identified. Included alongside each principle is some explanatory text and ideas for how to enable this in practice. *Note: from initial feedback received, we know they need redrafting to ensure they focus on positive aspects of the experience; are more succinct (we may not need all seven) and consider the tone of voice/audience more carefully.*

Included are suggestions for what this sounds like from a health professional's perspective as a way of discussing this with patients, and questions for how we will assess the extent to which the service considers this principle.

Although know the wording isn't quite right for all the principles, we are keen to test them with different audiences to determine whether they are a useful tool, and what changes need to be made to ensure they speak to the three audiences meaningfully.

Questions to ask during testing:

Principles in action:

- What does this principle look like done well?
- How might you use this principle? What tools/information/training do you need to put this into action?
- How could they add value to what happens already?
- Do they conflict/contradict with anything you are currently required to use/you currently use?
- Which words need more clarification?
- Do these principles help you to know how to better design or deliver a service for someone with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain?

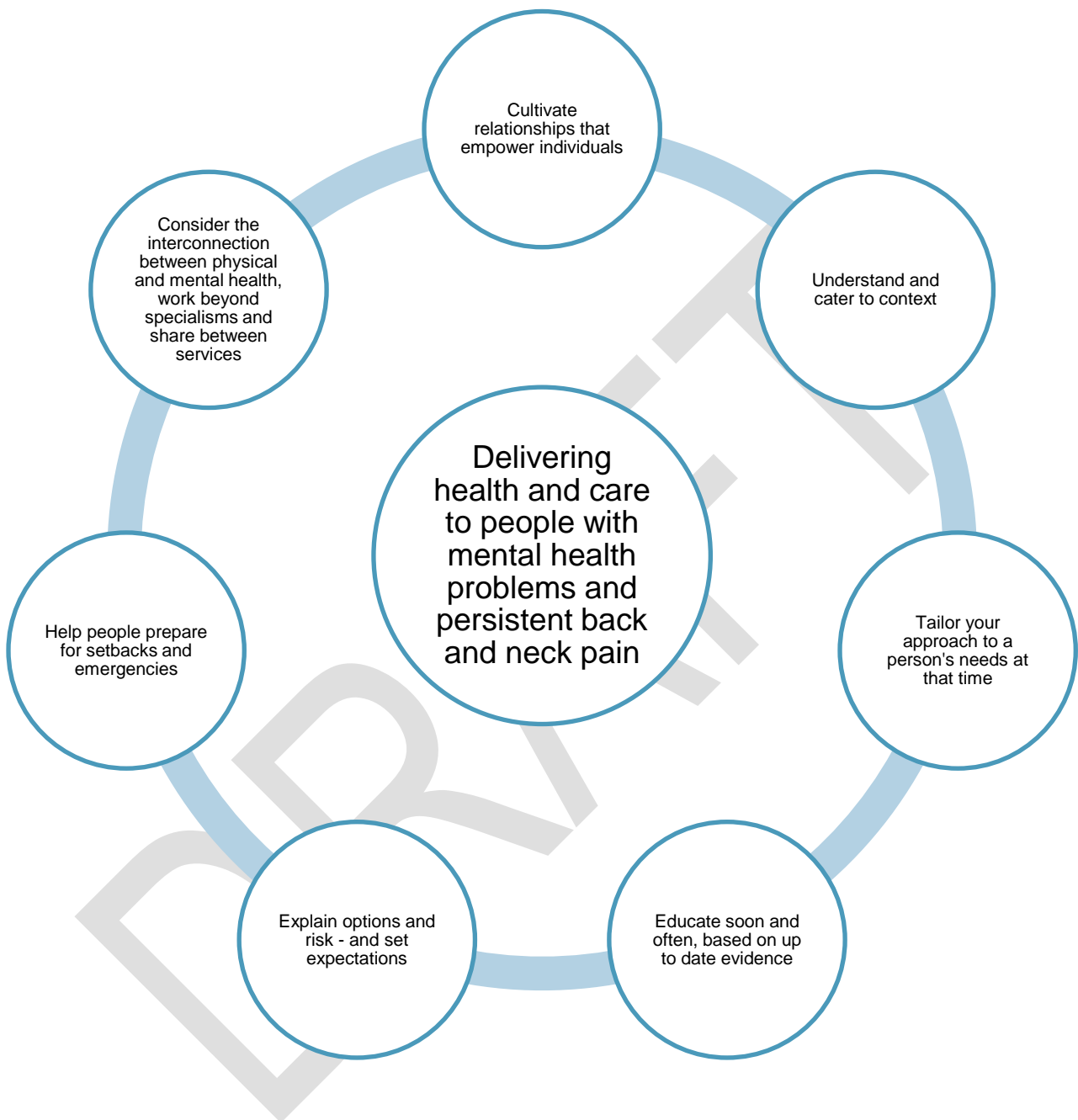
Audiences:

- Who are the people that need to know these principles?
- Who do you need to influence to use this in action?
- As service design principles: who is it that influences the design of a service, and therefore what is needed to ensure these are meaningful and relevant to support this process? How could these principles be used in the service development process?
- For the people delivering the service: there are a huge number of health and care professionals involved in supporting the health and care for people with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain. Do these principles speak to all of these professionals, or are they best directed at a specific audience (such as the GP?)
- For the people receiving the service: what do the principles sound like from their perspective, and how are they used?

Measuring success:

- How will you know when it is done well, or consider what needs work? (audit?)

The draft principles



1. Cultivate relationships that empower individuals

Success in managing mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain lies in the hands of the person experiencing it. Relationships between people and health care professionals should respect this and build confidence in the individual.

How to enable this in practice

- Recognise the expertise a person has of their own health and wellbeing.
- Help build on the skills and tools a person has to manage their health and wellbeing – resilience, acceptance, understanding their limits, self-awareness.
- Ask the right questions so you and the person living with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain can make the right choices together.
- Use plain English and language that can't be misinterpreted.

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

“We will take time getting to know each other, to help us understand all the factors that have an impact on your health and wellbeing. I want to ensure you feel confident, and supported, to look after your health and wellbeing. We will work out together which services and information is available, and who else could provide support to you”.

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

How do you enable or support effective relationships to be established or developed between service users and the person delivering the service?

2. Understand and cater to context (such as family, carer, job, hobbies)

Managing a mental health problem and persistent back and neck pain can impact on many areas of life, including relationships. Hobbies and work can play an important role in how people stay well. Equally important is a person's support network; living with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain can put huge strain on these relationships.

How to enable this in practice

- Understand a person's support network – do they have a supportive employer for instance, are they dealing with their health alone?
- Help them to involve carers and family members in decisions and planning for care if this is something they feel is helpful. What kind of support might their carers and family members need?
- Encourage people to reconnect with or adapt hobbies they may have set aside, or to continue with the ones they have.
- Point people in the direction of where and how they can get support at work.
- Consider interventions and support services for carers and family members to improve important relationships (e.g. relationship counselling; support groups).

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

"We will consider who you have around you that will support you; who you would like to involve in decisions about your health and care; the responsibilities and relationships that are necessary or important to you, and the things in your life that you enjoy and can help you feel well."

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

Does the service involve or take into account the work and family responsibilities of the service user, and support them to maintain or start activities that are important to them? Does the service involve or take into account the needs of family members/carers/supporters?

3. Tailor your approach to a person's needs at that time

Some people have lived with mental health problems and persistent neck and back pain for many years, others have only recently started experiencing problems. Everyone's capabilities, knowledge and perspective will be different depending on their situation, the experience they've had so far and their health and wellbeing in that moment.

How to enable this in practice

- If this is the first time you have met the individual, aim to understand their story. They may have explained it many times before, so they will appreciate it if you have already learnt from their notes.
- Take into account people's past experiences with health care, the issues they are facing right now and the goals they have for the future.

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

"I have a responsibility to review your medical records in advance of our meeting, but to ensure I understand you and your situation now, we may have to discuss things that you have already discussed with a health care professional before. It's useful to consider your history with the health service and how you have previously managed your health and care as this may influence the decisions we make today".

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

Does the service take a holistic assessment of the individual's health and the factors in their life that affect their health and care?

4. Educate soon and often, based on up to date evidence

Understanding how pain works and the interconnection between mental health and persistent back and neck pain can be helpful for a person living with both. Education can help people develop knowledge about what works for them, self-awareness, confidence and acceptance of their condition. Peer support can be an important part of learning, whether through a course or informally within a network that develops organically.

How to enable this in practice

- Provide people with access to relevant information and education opportunities.
- Make courses and content and information as accessible as possible.
- Consider people's social and psychological needs alongside their medical ones, including sleep, nutrition and physical activity.
- Consider who in your team needs to have up to date information and how they'll access it and share it with others.

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

"People's experience of mental health and pain are often related. We will consider what this means for you and what information I can provide to you, or services that I can help you to access, that will help you understand more about this."

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

How well does the service address the interconnection between mental health and persistent pain? Where does it signpost/support individuals to find out more? How does it support staff to develop their skills and knowledge on the interconnection?

5. Explain options and risk - and set expectations

When people are diagnosed with a mental health problem and/or persistent back and neck pain you may not be able to give them 'good news' to 'fix' their situation. The difference between a good experience and a bad experience can be down to setting expectations well, explaining risks and enabling fair comparison between options. Bear in mind that everybody is different, there are many options and it is not known which options will work for any one individual.

How to enable this in practice

- Explain options, enable fair comparison.
- Be clear about the range of options.
- Be transparent about risk and support people to make an informed decision.
- Give people a way to change their mind.
- Think about who else a person might want involved in their decision, such as other health care professionals involved in their care, their carer, family or a trusted friend.

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

"We will discuss the options that are available to you to best support your ongoing health and care and we will decide together what is best for you after we've considered the risks and benefits of different options. I will support you to find out more about the different options, and if you would like to involve a family member or carer in this process, I will support that".

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

How well does the service implement the principles of shared decision making? How well does it involve family members or carers in this process?

6. Help people prepare for setbacks and emergencies

People who are effectively self-managing mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain may have setbacks and significant changes in their health and wellbeing. Using skills and tactics to support self-management is a constant process through the many ups and downs of their experiences of persistent back and neck pain and mental health. It requires adaption as new health issues or complications arise.

People with mental health problems and persistent pain can face difficulties getting help in emergency situations. Having preparations in place may not prevent the need for emergency services but will make it a better experience for the individual and those providing support.

How to enable this in practice

- Helping people to know what to do when there is a significant change in their health and wellbeing, including when is the right time to use emergency services and what to say to help staff best treat them.
- Be proactive in identifying people with complex needs who may benefit from a different approach (e.g. longer appointment time).

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

“We will discuss the long-term implications of your health and wellbeing to ensure we both know what we can do if emergencies happen, and how we will ensure you have a consistent support from everyone involved in your care. “

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

How do we prepare an individual for their future requirements and needs? How are people with complex needs supported on an ongoing basis?

7. Consider the interconnection between physical and mental health, work beyond specialisms and share between services

Providing care for people with mental health problems and persistent back and neck pain can be challenging for a professional in a single specialism to provide alone. We know that mental health affects physical health and vice versa, therefore it is not enough to focus solely on either one.

How to enable this in practice

- Keep up to date with the latest research about the link between mental health and physical health in relation to mental health and persistent back and neck pain.
- Take people's pain seriously, even if there is no physical cause.
- Develop professional relationships with colleagues in other specialisms.

What this principle sounds like for health and care professionals, to engage patients with these principles:

"I will work with colleagues who have expertise in different areas of health and care to ensure you get the right support. You may see different people to support you for your treatment and care. We will ensure you know who everyone is involved in your health and care, and we will share relevant information to ensure we are working together effectively to best support you".

Questions to assess whether a service achieves this principle:

How effectively do the individuals involved in the service work with people from different specialisms? How effective is the multidisciplinary team working and information sharing?