Practitioners in Primary Care, Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust

The context
Advanced Practitioners in the Integrated Musculoskeletal Service of Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust are known as Extended Scope Practitioners (ESP). This team is comprised of Physiotherapists as well as Podiatrists with advanced knowledge and skills. The role of the ESP in primary care is a decision-making one to manage patients within primary care or to refer them forward for secondary care intervention. After a highly skilled assessment process the patients can be referred to Orthopaedics, Pain Clinic, Rheumatology or Physiotherapy for ongoing management. In Northamptonshire we have a clear integrated pathway from GP or as a result of patient self-referral into the Musculoskeletal Service. Patients will more often initially be reviewed by a Physiotherapist and if they are failing to improve with physiotherapy management then these patients are quickly referred forward to the ESP for further assessment and management.

How did you address this?
Extended Scope Physiotherapists have completed Masters Level training in advanced clinical reasoning, injection therapy and Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy. ESPs have advanced knowledge and skills in the assessment and management of highly complex patients, and having been IRMER registered and collaborated on creating guidelines for referring to MRI/dynamic ultrasound scanning, have the ability to choose to refer patients for the most appropriate radiology investigations. Furthermore they have completed training with the Pathology Department which allows them to refer for appropriate haematology, biochemistry, immunology and microbiology tests.

They have also completed a diploma in injection therapy and are able to offer diagnostic and therapeutic, peripheral joint and soft tissue injections.

Although employed by community services, Extended Scope Physiotherapists in Northampton have a good working relationship with secondary care Consultants in both Rheumatology and Orthopaedic Departments.

This helps with further mentorship and good communication links.

They keep up to date with relevant and current research and advances in Musculoskeletal medicine by attending conferences, having peer discussions, reflective practice and are also members of clinical interest groups such as ACPOMIT (Association of Chartered Physiotherapist of Orthopaedic Medicine and Injection), BESS (British Elbow and Shoulder Society), AACP (Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists) and EUSSER (European Society of Shoulder and Elbow Rehab) and MACP (Manipulative Association of Chartered Physiotherapists).

What difference did it make?
The integrated pathway has the advantage of having an Extended Scope Podiatrist working alongside Extended Scope Physiotherapists and this allows for the appropriate and timely management of foot and ankle problems.
The advanced knowledge and skill of the ESP also allows for the management of patients who are unsuitable for secondary care intervention due to various medical problems. ESPs are able to assess and refer for appropriate primary care management with liaison with the GP for example, referring forward for surgical appliances, in the way of appropriate bracing or various aids which would help with management of a patient’s chronic musculoskeletal problem.

An integrated model of care such as the one in Northamptonshire’s Musculoskeletal Service provides a clear pathway for appropriate patient management. The patient is seen by the right clinician at the right time and the appropriate decisions are made in a timely manner.