



Eleanor Dewhurst

## 1. Introduction

The Newburgh Wellbeing Choir opened its doors to the local community in September 2019, providing an opportunity for people to sing as part of a group for general wellbeing. There is evidence that singing improves our sense of wellbeing and lifts our mood<sup>(1)</sup>, as well as improving posture, breathing and muscle tension<sup>(2)</sup>. These health benefits cannot be mimicked by medications alone and, accordingly, many of the choir members joined as a result of 'social prescribing' by their GP. I have volunteered with the Newburgh Wellbeing Choir for 9 weeks, during which I have gained valuable insight into the impact of this community group and reflected on how this learning will influence my future practice.



## 2. Aims

My aims whilst volunteering with the Newburgh Wellbeing Choir...

Gain insight into how common wellbeing is promoted by singing in a group



Encourage those who feel isolated and who may benefit from the company of others to participate



Share my experience of music and singing with others

## 3. My Role and What I Learnt

I spent time building rapport with the choir members and finding out how the Newburgh Wellbeing Choir impacts them...

➤ Individuals described how their physical and mental health had improved since joining the choir, something that medications alone cannot replicate.

I worked together with other volunteers to engage those who seemed apprehensive and encouraged connections between individuals...

➤ Simple interventions to connect individuals can develop into long-term community engagement and consequential health benefits, including combatting loneliness.

I collected data from the choir members to contribute to research into the longitudinal impact of the choir...

➤ Although the research has not yet been published, I witnessed the improved demeanour of individuals as the choir grew and developed.

## 4. How will What I Learnt Impact my Future Professional Practice?

In accordance with the General Medical Council's (GMC's) Outcomes for Graduates<sup>(3)</sup>, my voluntary placement developed my...

Professional values and behaviours



Volunteering with the Newburgh Wellbeing Choir gave me the opportunity to work with other volunteers to implement a positive, engaging experience for choir members. My supervisors complemented my compassion, reliability and sensitive communication as I effectively managed myself and others, whilst developing and maintaining relationships with individuals. These skills are important for doctors to encompass, as emphasised in the Medical Leadership Competency Framework<sup>(4)</sup>. I would like to develop these competencies further by continuing to participate in community engagement projects. Indeed, since my placement, myself and some other ScotGEM students have visited a local care home to perform to and sing with the residents, which I am keen to make a regular occurrence.

Professional skills



I have previous experience as a carer on a one-to-one basis where I have been assigned individuals to care for, however, my voluntary placement tested my ability to inconspicuously identify and reach out to apprehensive individuals. I was praised for my ongoing confidentiality whilst on placement, especially surrounding the reasons why individuals had joined the choir. Naturally, I will be tested in my ability to maintain a high level of confidentiality throughout my career, in accordance with the GMC's Good Medical Practice guidelines<sup>(5)</sup>.

Numerous choir members commented on how the enthusiasm of myself and other volunteers inspired them to return week on week. I will continue to practice inspiring patients during my clinical interactions throughout medical school, for example, to improve their lifestyle habits. In this way, I further aim to apply my enthusiasm to my future practice in the form of motivational interviewing, which improves patient concordance with treatments<sup>(6)</sup>.

Professional knowledge



I was previously unaware of social prescribing and the impact that it can have not only on the physical and mental health of an individual, but also on the common wellbeing of the community. I have previously worked as a care assistant where prescriptions for patients were solely medication based; in hindsight, many of the issues that these patients presented with had underlying causes, such as loneliness and lack of social engagement. Indeed, I am eager to emphasise the profound effects of social prescribing in my future practice, after seeing how community engagement can improve people's health. I am excited to implement this holistic, person-centered approach to medicine throughout my studies, in line with the GMC's Outcomes for Graduates<sup>(3)</sup> and Good Medical Practice<sup>(5)</sup>, in a pursuit to optimise the health and wellbeing of patients. I will do this by ensuring that I address any underlying social or psychological needs of patients, in addition to their presenting complaint.

## 5. Conclusion and Action Plan

In conclusion, volunteering with the Newburgh Wellbeing choir gave me the opportunity to develop key skills for my future professional practice. Concurrently, I gained valuable insight into the positive impact of community engagement and social prescribing. To continue to develop my professional practice, in alignment with the GMC's Outcomes for Graduates and other guidance, I will apply what I have learnt to the clinical interactions that I encounter throughout medical school and participate in further community engagement projects.



### References:

1. Clift S, Morrison I. *Group singing fosters mental health and wellbeing: findings from the East Kent "singing for health" network project*. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 2011. 15(2): 88-97.
2. Stacy R, Brittain K. *Singing for health: an exploration of the issues*. *Health Education*, 2002. 102(4): 156-162.
3. General Medical Council. *Outcomes for Graduates*. 2018. Available from: [https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/dc11326-outcomes-for-graduates-2018\\_pdf-75040796.pdf](https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/dc11326-outcomes-for-graduates-2018_pdf-75040796.pdf) [Accessed 28th December 2019].
4. NHS Medical Leadership Competency Framework. *Enhancing Engagement in Medical Leadership*. 2010. Available from: <https://www.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/NHSLeadership-Leadership-Framework-Medical-Leadership-Competency-Framework-3rd-ed.pdf> [Accessed 28th December 2019].
5. General Medical Council. *Good Medical Practice*. 2019. Available from: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/good-medical-practice> [Accessed 28th December 2019].
6. Duff A, Latchford G. *Using motivational interviewing to improve medicines adherence*. *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, 2016.

All photos produced with permission or supplied by the Newburgh Wellbeing Choir.