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Margaret Hodge, Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform Visits GP Employment Adviser Scheme

Margaret Hodge, Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform today visited an innovative project which helps people back into work. Under the scheme, run by employment charity Tomorrow's People, patients at a North London surgery are given more than medical advice, they can also make an appointment with an employment adviser.

A specialist employment adviser from Tomorrow's People has been based within the James Wigg Practice, at Kentish Town, North West London for the last five years in a bid to help patients who are out of work for health reasons, but who would like to re-enter employment, education and training, or in some cases find jobs for the first time.

So far nearly 200 patients have seen the adviser at the James Wigg practice and, of those who have completed the programme, 87% have returned to employment or are back in education and training. On average, 82% are still in work 12 months on.

The scheme has been a great success for both the patients and the 17 doctors at the James Wigg Practice. They estimate that Tomorrow's People's presence there has helped save an average of five GP consultations per patient, already saving the surgery thousands of pounds.

Tomorrow's People now has a presence in 80 GPs' surgeries, hospitals and health centres in the UK, including GPs' surgeries across four London boroughs, Bristol, Devon, Merseyside and Glasgow's Southern General Hospital. The Tomorrow's People GP employment adviser scheme is an inspiration for a new pilot the Government plans to introduce, also placing employment advisers within doctors' surgeries.

Debbie Scott, Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People said: "We have received requests from over 400 GPs and health professionals across the UK asking for a similar service in their surgeries. The charity would like to expand to other areas of the country, but continue to search for funding opportunities to enable us to expand the scheme."

There are 2.7 million people claiming incapacity benefits, costing the state more than £6 billion a year. However this burden of costs has the potential to be reduced.

Many people receiving Incapacity Benefit and Disability Allowance are willing and able to work but because of difficulties arising from their health problems, such as low self-esteem or outdated skills, they need extra help with navigating their way back into sustainable employment.

Dr Roy Macgregor, a partner at the practice, said: "Having an employment adviser on site working as part of the primary care team is a unique way of helping people re-gain their confidence and re-enter the work place.



The employment adviser is based at James Wigg practice one day a week to help patients suffering from a range of conditions, including depression, mild circulatory disorders, back pain and stress. The idea was to help GPs to stop signing long-term 'sick notes' for certain patients who may benefit from receiving advice and assistance from a welfare and employment expert.

Dr Roy Macgregor continues: "In the past if a patient had asked me about getting back to work or welfare advice I would not have had the time or the knowledge to help and would have had to refer them to an outside agency.

"Now I can suggest to the patient that they talk to Tomorrow's People just across the hall. The other major advantage is that this service is independent and great trust has been built up between the patients and the adviser.

"They prefer to visit an independent expert here on site without fears of the stigma that can be attached to attending a job centre or a more formal service that they may find threatening.

"Tomorrow's People has saved myself and other doctors an average of five consultations for every patient that wants to explore the possibility of getting back to work, or wants education and training advice. But it has not only saved us time and money, it has changed many patients' lives, freeing them up from being stuck in the cycle of doctors consultations with no real direction."

Julie Sexton, Tomorrow's People Programme Manager, said: "There are many facets to helping a client who has been on long-term sickness back to work. Confidence building is key, as many have lost self-esteem and become depressed and really don't know what to do with their lives. Just making an appointment is often a major achievement.

"What is crucial is that we have the time to talk about any barriers to work. While we are not a counselling service, we spend at least an hour with an individual whereas a GP can only spend about 12 minutes with each patient. GPs have told us that a lack of resources and expertise in how best to assist, other than through treatment by prescription or referral to secondary care, can mean GPs sign long term 'sick notes', when they would prefer to offer more practical help.

"There are no quick fixes, everything we do is long-term. We begin with confidence building and then move on to retraining if necessary, then updating CVs and interview techniques. We stay in touch with the clients even after they are in work or training, giving advice and liaising between the client and their employer. Many have problems when they start working: facing the pressures of a new job, meeting new people, learning to fit in, but also how to assert themselves with colleagues.

"What some of the clients achieve through Tomorrow's People's help is quite incredible. From having no direction at all, many are now studying for degrees, re-training or in full-time employment."

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Notes to Editors

CASE STUDIES OF TOMORROW'S PEOPLE CLIENTS WHO HAVE BEEN HELPED BY THE ABOVE PROJECTS ARE AVAILABLE

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