

Reading Well Books on Prescription: Frequently Asked Questions

READING WELL

General information

What is the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme?

The Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme is an exciting new development in the public library health offer. It provides self-help reading for adults based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for a range of common mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders. Books are available from local libraries both on “prescription” and open access.

The scheme also signposts people to other well-being reading services in libraries including Mood-boosting Books, a national promotion of uplifting novels, poetry and non-fiction recommended by readers and social reading activity such as reading groups.

What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a talking therapy that can help people manage problems by changing the way they think and behave.

Is Books on Prescription new?

Books on Prescription is not new; it was first developed in Cardiff by Professor Neil Frude, a clinical psychologist. There has been a national scheme in Wales since 2005. Lots of English authorities already offer Books on Prescription schemes and have trail-blazed good practice.

How is Reading Well Books on Prescription different from what is already happening?

Reading Well is the first national Books on Prescription scheme for England. It builds on existing best practice in local delivery to create a quality assured and consistent model supported by shared resources.

It is also supported by national health partners including the Department of Health and the Royal Colleges which will help with the building of local library/health partnerships and support the sign-up of health professionals to the scheme. The development of local links with GPs and other health partners has been a challenge for some local schemes.

How does it work?

Reading Well Books on Prescription aims to increase access to quality assured health information and advice to help people understand and manage common mental health conditions.

It is an early intervention treatment and part of “watchful waiting” at step one in the Stepped Care Model for mental health and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) provision.

GPs can recommend self-help reading to people they might not yet refer to IAPT services, or to use whilst waiting for treatment. Books can also be recommended by other health professionals including mental health nurses, counsellors and IAPT psychological well-being practitioners as part of treatment.

Reading Well Books on Prescription is not designed to replace existing care but to provide added value and guidance. It can be used as a stand-alone treatment, as complementary to a pharmacological/and or psychological approach and as a key element in a supported programme.

The books are available in libraries for anyone to borrow. Some people may use library book collections independently as a first step in seeking help.

Are health professionals also recommending novels and poetry?

Health professionals will only be recommending CBT-based self-help reading to patients. The user and guide for professionals supporting Reading Well Books on Prescription does, however, also signpost people to the well-being benefits of Mood-boosting books and reading groups.

The evidence base

What does the evidence say?

Evidence is growing that non-fiction self-help books based on the principles of CBT can be effective. For a review of the evidence base go to www.readingagency.org.uk/readingwell

Guided versus unguided self- help

The evidence suggests that guided self-help (as part of a programme of treatment) is more effective than unguided self-help. However, books alone can also be useful as they contain techniques of proven effectiveness used by professionals and are a springboard into further professional help.

What do the NICE guidelines say?

Guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommend CBT-based self-help approaches as a first step in the treatment of common mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, phobias, chronic fatigue and some eating disorders.

Is there evidence to support the value of creative and social reading?

Although there is less clinical data for the well-being benefits of creative and social reading compared to self-help reading, [evidence](#) for the benefits of creative and social reading is growing. See www.readingagency.org.uk/readingwell

The need

Is there a need for such a service?

There is an enormous need for quality assured help with understanding and managing common mental health conditions.

1 in 4 people suffer mental ill health in Great Britain in any one year. Depression and anxiety is most common and most frequently untreated. There are around 6 million people suffering depression and anxiety in England, and three quarters or 4.5 million people are not currently receiving any treatment.¹

Are libraries the right place?

Recent health mapping research findings indicate that people see their library as a safe, trusted and non-stigmatised place to go for help with and information about health problems.²

Conditions covered

What conditions are covered by Reading Well Books on Prescription?

Reading Well Books on Prescription provides evidence-based self-help in the following areas: Anger, anxiety, binge eating, chronic pain, depression, health anxiety, obsessions and compulsions, panic, phobias, relationship problems, self-esteem, sleep problems, social phobias, stress and worry.

Why are some physical conditions included?

The focus of the Reading Well Book on Prescription scheme is in providing professionally recommended resources to support the management of psychological distress and symptom management. This can be relevant to some physical conditions such as chronic fatigue and pain.

In relation to fatigue and chronic fatigue, Reading Well suggests self-help in the form of books in which CBT has been proven to be effective in the treatment of fatigue. Research evidence indicates that general practitioners should be encouraged to use self-help literature to support the management of chronic fatigue.

Why are some common conditions not included?

Some common mental health conditions e.g. anorexia, bi-polar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder have not been included in the 2013 Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme following the advice of health partners. The reasons for this are either that the evidence base is insufficient or that self-help treatment might be harmful without appropriate accompanying therapy.

Resources

What resources are available?

A [core book list of 30 expert-endorsed self-help titles](#), plus [user guides](#), [guides for health professionals](#) and promotional posters are available to support Reading Well Books on Prescription.

The Reading Well webpage – www.readingagency.org.uk/readingwell – includes helpful information and digital resources.

¹ *How Mental Illness Loses Out in the NHS*, Centre for Economic Performance's Mental Health Policy Group, LSE, 2012

² *Public Library Activity in the Areas of Health and Well-Being*, Hicks, D., Creaser, C. et al, MLA, 2010

A downloadable prescription form and toolkits for library staff and health professionals will be available to support the scheme.

Mood-boosting Book lists and materials will also be available soon from the [Reading Agency shop](#).

[Reading Group for Everyone](#) provides useful tips for starting and joining a reading group as well as a national database of existing groups.

How were the self-help books chosen?

An evidence-based approach supported by a rigorous process of consultation and expert advice was put in place to support the book selection process. The books selected have all been recommended by experts. They have been tried and tested and found to be useful. The [book selection protocol](#) provides further information about this process.

The Reading Well Books on Prescription Core reading list is only available for use as part of The Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme. Permission to use this resource by agencies not subscribing to this scheme should be sought from The Reading Agency.

Will the core self-help book list be reviewed?

The core book list will be reviewed by the Reading Well expert group and user panels. We are planning to release a revised core self-help list in autumn 2014.

Can books be added to the core self-help list locally?

The core booklist has been endorsed by national partners. Additional material cannot be added to the list. There is, however, a space on the recommendation form for local resources to be highlighted. Local resources can also be signposted via local websites.

Will the range of conditions included in the scheme be widened?

National development plans include a review of conditions included on the core list, as well as separate lists focused on children and young people, dementia/Alzheimers, carers and some physical health conditions in years two and three.

Partnerships

Who are the delivery partners?

Reading Well is being delivered by The Reading Agency in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians. Development funding came from the Arts Council of England's Library Development Initiative.

The Reading Agency is an independent charity with a mission to give everyone an equal chance in life by helping people become confident and enthusiastic readers. It is funded by the Arts Council, and has a formal partnership with public library services. www.readingagency.org.uk

The Society of Chief Librarians leads the debate on the future of public libraries and advocates for continuous improvement of the public library service on behalf of local people. See www.goscl.com for more information.

Who are the supporting health partners?

- Department of Health Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Programme (IAPT)
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Royal College of Nursing
- Royal College of Psychiatrists
- British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapies (BACP)
- The British Psychological Society
- Mind

Launch of Reading Well Books on Prescription in libraries

When will Reading Well Books on Prescription be available in libraries?

The scheme will be available in English libraries following a national partnership launch in early June 2013. The date will depend on ministerial availability and will be confirmed as soon as possible.

How will GPs and other health professionals be informed about the scheme?

There has been one round of communication about the scheme linked to the announcement at the Society of Chief Librarian's National Offer Launch at the end of January. Leading up to the partnership event/launch, SCL and The Reading Agency will be communicating key messages about the scheme through partners' newsletters, journals and magazines, including how health professionals can get involved.

Extent of library involvement

To what extent will English library authorities be supporting Reading Well Books on Prescription?

Reading Well Books on Prescription is a universal health offer in England. It is supported by 83% of English library authorities.

Is this scheme of value in the face of library closures?

Reading Well Books on Prescription demonstrates how public libraries can play a key part in delivering on a key policy area; improving the health and well-being of local communities. As part of the national offers work led by SCL, it sees English libraries combining forces to save money and make more impact with one big shared scheme which for the first time is formally backed by major health partners, and also incorporates creative reading opportunities. It is a perfect example of how to sweat library assets, developing libraries' information and reading roles to improve public health and an example of collective working to lever in both national and local investment.

Will library closures restrict access to the scheme?

Books can be reserved online and will be made available at the nearest local library via the interlibrary loan system.

Can community managed libraries be involved?

Community managed libraries are eligible to run the scheme as long as they meet delivery guidelines. They must:

- Contact their local library authority to explore ways they can work together to deliver the scheme
- Stock the full collection of 30 Reading Well titles in sufficient quantities to ensure adequate provision for the target audience
- Purchase appropriate quantities of the Reading Well user guide to ensure people are fully informed about the scheme and where to go for further support
- Partner with appropriate health professionals able to recommend titles and support people in understanding and managing their conditions. Guides for professionals should be provided to support this process
- Provide Mood-boosting Book collections supported by resources
- Help people to find local reading group activity through www.readinggroups.org

Can organisations other than public libraries deliver Reading Well Books on Prescription?

Non-public library organisations wishing to take part in the scheme as independent bodies can do so as long as they meet the above criteria. Non-public library organisations include health organisations/agencies, prisons, third sector agencies, and HE and FE colleges. Non-public library organisations must ensure they contact the local library service to explore partnership opportunities.

Co-ordination of Reading Well Books on Prescription

What role does The Reading Agency play?

The Reading Agency will act as the central point of contact for the scheme managing its delivery, co-ordination, communications, national partnerships and development plan in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians.

What role do public library authorities play?

Public library authorities are the local co-ordinating agencies for the scheme and manage local partnership development. Public libraries will manage book stock and resources and act as the contact point for enquiries from local GPs and other health professionals wishing to become involved. It is a local decision as to whether libraries charge health professionals for materials.

How will the scheme be delivered consistently in all libraries?

There will be a library staff toolkit outlining the delivery framework for the scheme. Library services are asked to comply with the national guidelines for the scheme although there will also be scope to adapt these to suit local circumstances.

What library concessions support the scheme?

Most authorities currently offer free reservations for Books on Prescription titles as well as easy library joining for people with recommendation/prescription forms signed by a health professional. SCL have agreed that all authorities should aim to deliver these concessions if possible whilst recognising that this is dependent on local policy. Extended loan periods and no overdue charges are also key targets for the scheme.

Should there be a Reading Well Book collection in every library?

Some authorities have purchased collections for all library service points, including mobiles and prison libraries. It is recognised that this level of provision will not be possible for all authorities. The guidelines for the scheme require that books are available through every library service point supported by the interlibrary loan system.

Prescribing partnerships

How do GPs and other health professionals take part?

Health professionals will be informed of the scheme via the partnership communications strategy managed by The Reading Agency and SCL. Health professionals will be directed to contact their local library service if they wish to sign up to the scheme. The Reading Agency will direct any sign-up enquiries it receives to the relevant service via the agreed contact point.

Digital platforms

Is there a national Reading Well Books on Prescription website?

There is a webpage at www.readingagency.org.uk/readingwell. This includes information and as well as links to downloadable [resources](#). It will also include links to relevant local library websites containing Reading Well Books on Prescription material.

What role will local library websites play?

Local websites may wish to replicate some of the material on the Reading Well webpages as well as link to them. They are also likely to carry local information and contacts for the scheme as well as signpost local resources and relevant agencies.

They should also link to Reading Groups for Everyone – www.readinggroups.org

Ordering materials

When can materials be ordered by libraries?

The first order deadline for materials was 31 March 2013. Authorities still negotiating local funding and partnership models will be able to order/re-order materials beyond the deadline. We expect to be able to accommodate orders placed during April from stock. After that, we will have planned re-ordering windows, which are needed to ensure we can keep costs to a minimum.

Business model

How will the shared approach save money?

Reading Well Books on Prescription replicates the Summer Reading Challenge model. It:

- Delivers economies of scale resulting in high quality resources at lower cost
- Centralises administration and management releasing capacity at the front line and reducing local overheads
- Avoids duplication and reinventing of the wheel
- Delivers a commission-ready product relevant to the new commissioning landscape which includes 5.45 billion pounds ring-fenced for the delivery of local authority health services
- Delivers a low cost, early intervention and prevention strategy and cost-effective community service to help promote well-being
- As well as saving money, it raises the profile of the public library contribution to local health and well-being and has brokered some important new national and local library partnerships

How will libraries pay for Reading Well resources?

Many library authorities have secured support from local public health commissioning for the purchase of Reading Well resources and library book collections. The Reading Well Books on Prescription [commissioning guide](#) has been designed to help with funding/commissioning discussions.

Long-term vision

Is there a sustainable vision for Reading Well Books on Prescription?

The Reading Agency and SCL are developing a long-term Reading Well Books on Prescription development plan for the next three years. We will be focusing on national fundraising to support the sustainability of the Reading Well Books on Prescription programme and the development of new targeted lists. There are also plans to develop the scheme to work with new partners e.g. hospitals and pharmacies to widen reach. This work will be supported by the development of local partnerships and commissioning models.

Evaluation

How will success be measured?

We are currently developing a national evaluation plan. Key indicators of success will include the number of library authorities and partners signing up, book issues and qualitative impact.