

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 Wednesday 1 November 2017**

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## **80,000-strong workforce an *untapped* resource to tackle public health challenges**

A [report](#) published today (1 November 2017) by the [Royal Society for Public Health](#) (RSPH) and the [Professional Standards Authority](#) has revealed the extent to which practitioners on accredited registers – an 80,000 strong workforce including counsellors, acupuncturists, and sports therapists<sup>1</sup> – are able to contribute to addressing the growing public health crises in the UK.

The report, which is based on a survey of more than 4,500 practitioners in the accredited registers (AR) workforce, found both a willingness and ability to promote the public's health through healthy lifestyle conversations and effective signposting with patients. However, despite the vast majority of the AR workforce (89%) considering their job role to include "promoting the public's health", three quarters of them (74%) feel under-utilised in doing so. Other key findings of the report include:

- AR practitioners typically build trusted long-term relationships with their patients and so are naturally well placed to have healthy conversations: many already provide support on mental wellbeing (64%), signposting to healthier lifestyle services (36%), and advice on physical activity (29%).
- The main barriers identified to contributing further included difficulty in staying up to date with the range of local services for effective signposting, concerns that conversations could make patients feel uncomfortable, and the relative inaccessibility of the workforce to the public.

The key recommendations of the report include:

- Public health teams to create and regularly update a list of services bringing all local signposting information together, and disseminate this to AR practitioners.
- AR practitioners to have authority to make direct NHS referrals, in appropriate cases, thereby reducing the administrative burden on GP surgeries.
- Accredited registers to consider introducing a standardised health assessment tool to be used with new patients.

The full report, *Untapped Resources: Accredited Registers in the Wider Workforce*, can be viewed [here](#).

**Shirley Cramer CBE, Chief Executive of RSPH and Chair of the Government's Advisory Group, People in UK Public Health, said:** *"The public health challenges facing the UK today are deep-seated, varied, and of increasing cost to the NHS. It's vital that we continue to make progress on such health priorities as obesity and smoking, but to do this we must increase the capacity of those willing to support the public's health. The AR workforce has a willingness and is well placed to join the wider public health workforce, and numbering 80,000 is now twice the size of the UK's core public health workforce.*

*"We know that AR practitioners typically take a holistic approach to wellbeing, and develop long term and trusted relationships with their patients, putting them in an ideal position to have lifestyle health conversations with them. The AR workforce accounts for thousands of interactions with members of the public every day: we are calling for these practitioners to be given the right support, so that we can unleash their full potential to improve the public's health."*

**Harry Cayton, Chief Executive of the Professional Standards Authority, said:** *"The AR programme is now well-established within the regulatory framework, providing independent assurance of registers covering a diverse and engaged workforce. There is huge potential for this workforce to contribute to individual wellbeing and public health objectives, such as weight loss, stopping smoking and taking exercise.*

*"It is vitally important that GPs, nurses and other healthcare professionals who work in the community are aware of the potential for the AR workforce to further contribute to promoting the public's health so that they are able to make better use of this existing resource."*

### **Notes to editors:**

#### **The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH)**

- The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) is an independent health education charity, dedicated to protecting and promoting the public's health and wellbeing;
- We are the world's longest-established public health body with over 6,000 members drawn from the public health community both in the UK and internationally;
- Our operations include an Ofqual recognised awarding organisation, a training and development arm, and health and wellbeing accreditation.
- We also produce a wide-variety of public health conferences; our publishing division includes the internationally renowned journal Public Health; and we are developing policy and campaigns to promote better health and wellbeing.
- For more information visit [our website](#) or follow us on Twitter: [@R S P H](#)

## The Professional Standards Authority

- The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care oversees nine statutory bodies that regulate health and social care professionals in the UK.
- We assess their performance and report to Parliament. We also conduct audits and investigations and can appeal fitness to practise cases to the courts if we consider that sanctions are insufficient to protect the public and it is in the public interest.
- We also set standards for organisations holding registers of practitioners working in health and social care occupations not regulated by law and accredit those that meet them.
- We share good practice and knowledge, conduct research and introduce new ideas to our sector. We monitor policy developments in the UK and internationally and provide advice on issues relating to professional standards in health and social care.
- We do this to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of users of health and social care services and the public. We are an independent body, accountable to the UK Parliament.
- For more information visit [our website](#) or follow us on Twitter: [@prof\\_standards](#)

## End notes

1: The accredited registers workforce includes a range of different healthcare practitioners, including nutritional therapists, play therapists, sports rehabilitators, counsellors and psychotherapists, foot health practitioners, acupuncturists, massage therapists, reflexologists, and a variety of other complementary therapists. They are not regulated by law but by the professional bodies they are registered to, who are in turn independently assessed by the Professional Standards Authority.