

Example of GPs script:

Patient contribution

Yourself?

Yeah, tell me more.

All about the shoulder.

You weren't particularly wanting to focus on the rest of the stuff today?

But it's mostly about your shoulder today; was there anything else that's a priority for today?

You sure?

So, the swimming's been really helpful for you but this is impacting on your life because you're not able to swim.

Yeah. How else has it affected your life?

Well let's come back to that another time, if that's okay with you.

ICE

So, you think it's probably linked with swimming?

And you're thinking rotator cuff?

Worst case scenario was there anything else on your mind apart from the rotator cuff.

Particularly related to the shoulder, worst case scenario, what was going through your mind?

What were you hoping I might do for you today?

PSO

Work wise how are things?

Finances are okay?

Home life?

Just remind me who's at home?

Just you? Okay. Social life?

Not a big boozer?

Yeah, okay. And your dad?

So, family-side, you've got your sister, you've got your dad's sister, who else is there?

Who else is important to you? Friends?

You've never been a smoker?

was it you stopped, because you've not—you don't smoke now, do you?

Great. Okay. Any other bad habits that I need to know about?

Red flags

Can I just check there's nothing more serious going on when it comes to your shoulder?

Your weight came down because you were exercising, but it is staying static, and if anything, it's going back up again. So, there's nothing suggesting anything nasty behind this at all?

No cough?

No breathlessness?

No blood in your spit or anything like that?

And shoulder pain wise, that tends to be when you're doing particular things – it's not there all the time and it's not disturbing your nights' sleep?

Thoughts not been particularly dark?

Focussed history

Are you doing other things instead?

Any upper body work at all? Not so much?

And you're capable of doing that, despite your shoulder?

And have you had physio as yet? You mentioned that you've got this friend who suggested it?

What stroke do you do when you swim?

Focussed examination

Would you be comfortable slipping your shirt off?

Should we do your weight first of all?

And then we'll have a look at your shoulder.

So about 80 kilos, which is really good for you, isn't it?

Take your shirt off while you're talking if that's okay.

Good. Neck movement's alright, so if you just copy me, so. Ear down to one side, ear down to the next side, and then bring your, your arms up, bring your hands in, and then arms out. So good external rotation of your shoulders.

No obvious asymmetries. You never fractured your shoulder or a clavicle or anything like that?

If you can bring your arms forward now, all the way up. Good range of movement, and then arms down, as you're bringing it down, I'm looking for pain in your eyes, no sign of pain in your eyes as you're coming down, that's lovely. Okay, so good upper body definition, no wasting of your muscles, that's lovely. Okay. Can you put your arms behind your back? That's lovely, okay, and then behind your head. And it hurts?

A bit of a tweak, but nothing desperately?

Put your arms down now, that's lovely. I want you to resist my movement, so you're going to push my arms out against me. So, this is lovely - not particularly painful?

Pull your hands in towards your tummy. Pull in, and then relax and push out against me. Push out, that's lovely, and then relax. So that's sore?

A little bit, so a little bit of pain on resisted external rotation of your shoulder, but good range of movement there. I'm also going to touch on your shoulder, so we can check, first of all, your clavicle, your collar bone, and also your potential sore points around the shoulder - which are not tender when I'm doing that. I'm also going to just check your biceps, so if you

pull your biceps—if you pull your hand towards your shoulder, not particularly sore doing that?

That's great. Elbow movements are fine as well?

Lovely, okay, great. If you pop your shirt back on?

Identify problem and explain diagnosis

You've got very minimal inflammation of your rotator cuff.

Check understanding

Does that sound okay?

Does that make sense?

Questions?

Develops management plan / shares management plan

And the activity is good for you, there's no question, but you want to make sure that you don't overdo it with the wrong sorts of exercise?

Because you're feeling the pain, and you're getting the gain, but you don't want to overplay a bit of wear and tear, do you? You want to—So, what you're saying, your friend was saying maybe a bit of physiotherapy, wondering about the rotator cuff – I think you're probably right about the rotator cuff side of things.

Erm, if you would like, then it's reasonable to help you cope with discomfort, to use an anti-inflammatory rub-on painkiller, that might be one option that would work for you, because it's low-risk to you.

But you might still want to see a physiotherapist, and the reason for seeing a physiotherapist is so that they can ensure that your exercise programme is entirely appropriate for you.

There's a very cost-effective (rub on) medication that you could buy over the counter which may help you cope when the pain flares up a little bit.

Now, if you're getting a lot of trouble with this rotator cuff, then if you have a bad flare up then I would be delighted to inject it for you.

But I'm not suspecting that you really need that, at this time.

I don't tend to encourage people to be using anti-inflammatory pain killers because in the long term they're perhaps not the most healthy.

Because they put people's blood pressure up and they can irritate the stomach.

But if you have a flare up, they sometimes are useful to use in the short term.

This is a safer version of that, so the rub-on version would be a safer version.

I think that in terms of getting your exercise program right, the physio is an appropriate way of getting that sort of support.

So, either a physiotherapist on the NHS or if you've got a private therapist in terms of somebody down the gym who can advise you on how to look after your rotator cuff, that's an alternative as well. Have you got anyone like that?

But somebody who understood how the shoulder works and sort of machines that are there for you might be in an even better place than the physiotherapist.

Shall we refer you to a physiotherapist, with the proviso that when I refer you to a physio, it takes four weeks before you're seen, and you would need, then, to connect with them. You would need to go and see them, and then we would probably assess your problem and then probably give you a lot of work to do. So, a few exercises to go off and do. Does that sound like something you would...?

We can just say that you're not going to be around at that time and that you can connect with them whenever you can.

I like that idea. If you can actually get someone who's a swimming coach who understands the way the shoulder works, you might well find that you get considerably less problems with your shoulder, but you're going to make the best of it because your shoulder's in not back nick, really, and the exercise you're doing is probably pretty good for you on the whole.

You just want to make sure that you're not overdoing it.

Well it's an anti-inflammatory rub on cream. There's a tiny risk of it sun-sensitising you.

But it's an area of you that's going to be covered for the most part anyway, so using it four times a day, when you're needing it - it's just there to dull any pain.

Safety net and follow up

So from the point of view of when I need to see you again - I'm delighted to see you, if you're having a lot more trouble with this.

So, if you're finding you're getting a lot more pain in the shoulder, particularly if it's keeping you awake at night, then pop back in and we'll think about whether or not you need that injection at that time. For the time being, you could self-medicate with the cream if you wanted to.

But obviously if you're getting a lot more pain, then let's assess it. I always say with people with shoulder pain, just in case I'm wrong about what's causing the shoulder pain, because you get pain when you do certain things - but certain people have shoulder pain because they've got something else going on in their body.

So if they had breathlessness together with that shoulder pain, or if they were losing weight or coughing up blood, I need to learn about that sort of thing urgently - but nothing suggesting that in your story at all.

Shall we meet again about the other thing? I'll leave it down to you. Yeah?