Public Health Principles and Practice for Nursing Associates

Assignment 1

Report

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Luton

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are some of the leading health concerns prevalent in the UK and the Luton region in particular. An STI is, in fact, any bacterial or viral infection that can be transmitted through unprotected sexual contacts. An STI is, in fact, any bacterial or viral infection that can be transmitted through unprotected sexual contacts (Blmk healthier together.nhs.uk. 2017). In order to manage this issue, there is a need for both local and national strategies that are fostered by the government as well as the efforts by the health care professionals, which includes nurses. This discussion will identify the government drivers, the national and local initiatives in Luton, and the contribution of nurses in advocating for, preventing, and protecting the health of patients who use STI services.

# **About Luton:**

Luton is densely populated compared to several of the London boroughs with the approximated population of 213,500. The population of Luton grew to a certain point and then declined from 2016 to 2018 but slightly increased after that. Luton is a multiculture town with a majority of people from other ethnic backgrounds than white British (Public Health Intelligence, Luton, 2022). Luton had a relatively young population; however, this is expected to increase in the future with higher proportion of people from the higher age bracket. These population characteristics put into the health and social care needs in the town.

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are STIs and are a concern in the East of England. Among all the UK Health Security Agency’s (UKHSA) regions it currently ranks lowest in terms of newly reported STIs in England (UK Health Security Agency, 2014). East of England residents diagnosed with STIs with the rate up to 445 per 100,000 population on our timeline (Luton Borough Council, 2022). 29,537 new STIs were diagnosed in East of England residents in 2022, representing a rate of 445 diagnoses per 100,000 population. Diagnosed rates per new STI per 100000 population varied by upper tier local authority from 355 in Central Bedfordshire to 630 in Luton (GOV.UK., 2024).

# **STIs effect in Luton:**

Luton is significantly better to similar areas in terms of STI diagnosis rate however HIV late diagnosis remains a significant issue to address. The report by GOV.UK., (2024a) mostly concentrates on trends between 2021 and 2022 but data from 2018 is also used for comparison with the previous and post COVID-19 period of sexual health services. As seen, in 2020 and 2021, both consultation and STI diagnosis numbers were affected in part due to pandemic disruptions and therefore changes between 2021 and 2022 should be viewed with reference to the pandemic. The four most diagnosed STIs in the East of England were chlamydia, gonorrhoea, first episode genital warts, and first episode genital Herpes in 2022. The largest rise was recorded with gonorrhoea diagnoses, up by 58%; presently, gonorrhoea and syphilis rates are higher than they were pre-pandemic (Town Centre Surgery Luton, 2024).

The percentage of individuals diagnosed with chlamydia also grew by 9%. The National Chlamydia Screening Programme (NCSP) changed in focus in June 2021 for avoidable impact on the reproductive health of young women (NHS, 2019). The diseases are more frequent in people within the ages of 15 to 24 years, gays, bisexuals, and people of black origin. The overall STI rates for individuals by gender and age were ranked with females and males of 20-24 years recording the highest rates, females 15-19 years and males of 25-24 years. According to the data received from GOV.UK., (2024a), in 2022, 692 people of black Caribbean ethnicity and 1625 people of black African ethnicity were diagnosed with STI; 3% and 6% of all the new STI cases, respectively. According to the Birmingham City Council (2023), Promoting and funding of services on sexual health is proven an ability to provide value for money and a significant return on investment.

# **Public Health Protection Services:**

**At Local Level:**

At the local level, Luton has embraced these national goals and tries to tailor them to the needs of the people. Working with GPs, sexual health clinics, and other healthcare providers, the local council of Luton has made the access to these services absolutely free: STI testing, sexual health clinics, and outreach (NHS, 2024). They also engage in educational crusades throughout the sexual health campaign on abstinence, safer sex practices and condom use among different societies such as schools, colleges and group congregations so as to have an outreach on the compromise groups ‌(Town Centre Surgery, Luton, 2024).

Locally, Luton offers specific services to improve sexual health outcomes including Sexual Health Clinics where private tests, consultations, and treatment is given and Online Services where self-testing kits are given on the door step with the convenience of getting them delivered at their door step (Luton GOV.UK., 2024).  Targeted Outreach Programs are also given which includes reaching out to schools and other community relevant organizations to young people and high risk sexually active groups and Integrated Services which are taken to General Practitioners, pharmacists and other workers in community health (Luton GOV.UK., 2022).

Sexual Health Services consultations in 2022 were 34% higher than in 2021 with 409,657 and 305,692 consultations respectively. Of these the proportions were 46% online consultations which has risen by 73% 37% face to face consultations/ and 17% via telephone consultations (GOV.UK., 2024a).

**At National Level:**

There are many national campaigns by the UK government in place to tackle STI spread and enhance sexual health of the community. The Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy as given by Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2022) and the Public Health England (PHE) Action Plan by GOV.UK. (2024b) have outlined programs to scale down STI transmission and the targeted population includes the youth, and those with many sexual partners. They include increasing the awareness of the diseases, increasing accessibility of testing and treatment services and the elimination or reduction of stigma that comes with the diseases

NHS Choices, (2024) gives information on various Sexual health clinics and the NHS serve the whole nation in delivering services to do with screening, treating, as well as educating people regarding STIs. There is also the advertising of the online services, potential of ordering the self-testing kits to enhance the extenders Some of the most common ones include the PHE’s ‘Protect against STIs’ through which Public Health England seeks to remind people to practise safe sex, use condoms and get tested regularly (Public Health England, 2019).

# **Nursing Role in Promoting, Preventing, and Protecting**

STI service is part of the healthcare services where nurses have major responsibilities in the promotion, prevention, and protection of the health of the patients. They act in accordance with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (2020) Code and Standards of proficiency for Nursing associates in delivery of quality, safe and effective and personalised care.

## **Health Promotion and Education:**

Nursing Associates (NA) practice preventive health activities like; getting involved in community sensitization activities that create awareness on safe sex practice, need to frequently screen for the STIs as well as activities that minimize risk factors (The Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2024)

Teaching people in schools, clinics, and community meetings is critically important in prevention. NA’s promote awareness of normal and acceptable courses of actions in relation to STI testing, including proper usage of condoms and adequate discussion of intimate matters with sexual partners (RCN, 2024).

Consequently, there is considerable evidence in the literature that mental health consumers have high sexual health need and that these needs affect health and recovery. Mental health nurses are well positioned to advocate sexual health and to facilitate consumers to access sexual health and family planning services. A particular necessity for training enhancement in self-assurance and literacy course in mental health nurses to sexual health is the need (Quinn et al., 2018).

## **Screening and Early Detection:**

Petry et al., (2019) discusses that nurses participate in the health-screening exercises by conducting tests on STIs essential in providing early detection to contain transmission. They explain to their patients’ in private about the exercise and the tests to be conducted to check for the above diseases and ailments. Specialist or other types of support services are also advised by NA’s; for instance sexual health consultants, or counseling agencies for psychological effects of patients with STIs (Quinn et al., 2018).

## **Campaign Participation and Community Engagement**

Currently, the NA’s are involved in the local and national campaigns including but not limited to those led by PHE in the efforts to bring down the rates of STIs and increase awareness on Sexual Health. It also assists them with attempts in increasing outreach and success rates of these campaigns. I found evidence of a paradox between high incident rate of sexual problems and lack of desire among nurses/midwives of providing sexual health care. The WHO (2024) affirms that sexual health information and promotion as a part of key facets of primary Health care services. NA’s and midwives final education for practice and career process and work adjacent to sexual health should become competent and avoid the obstacles that inhibit their effective engagement in sexual health services (Azar et al., 2022).

## **Audits and Quality Improvement**

Auditing and being involved in quality improvement activities makes a surety that sexual health services delivery is efficient and current. According to Mohamed et al., (2024), nurses participate in the evaluation of clinical practices, measurement of effects, determination of conformity to the evidence based clinical practice standards. Sexual health nurse prescribers and those working with patient group directions were providing safe and therapeutically appropriate medicines. Optimization of CD has been suggested. Furthermore, patients as users of patient group directions should be encouraged to observe any limits of the discussion which can be improved through continued training, audit, and staff calibration (Black et al., 2020).

## **Protection and Advocacy**

NA’s practice advocacy to vulnerable groups like the youths or people with learning disabilities to get the right information and services. These individuals are can speak on behalf of these groups, including any issues related to service delivery on sexual health. All sexual health clinics should have protocols in place to address communication needs of certain patient population, such as patients who speak other languages than English, patients with hearing or learning disability and illiterate patients (Brook et al., 2020). They also protect the patient’s information privacy and dignity as required by the NMC Code (2018).

José et al., (2017) discussed that the required training and motivation of the professionals including NA’s that perform the tests can be solved with systematization of permanent education activities, implementation of mentoring, supervised activities and problematized and planned abilities after the identification of learning gaps. For instance, means for instruments to be used in post-test counseling and biosafety issues relevant to test performance can be learned through a collaborative approach thus creating a working network of interaction between, these professionals during the carrying out of the tests, counseling and educational sessions.

# **Conclusion**

A combination of both national and local activities is essential in order to address the occurrence of STIs in Luton area. Concerns towards sexual health are addressed via government approved agendas that may include specific measures like widening of the campaigning and testing and educational agencies. Sexual health is an essential area where patients spend most of the time with nursing associates who are also involved in teaching, counselling, screening, and referring patients and participating in the community activities. This care delivery is based on the NMC Code and Standards to guarantee care that is centred on patient, safe, and efficient.

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