

rethinking medicine

A holistic approach to primary care

The Bromley by Bow centre is a general practice and community hub developed by and for locals in East London.

Why?

The Bromley by Bow centre is in Tower Hamlets, a hugely diverse borough with high levels of deprivation, child poverty and poor health outcomes. The centre seeks to answer the needs of its population in the broadest sense, using community assets to address social determinants of health.

How is it rethinking medicine?

Through the establishment of a holistic general practice including a variety of community and social services, GPs are able to help their patients get better in all aspects of their lives rather than just a small clinical aspect. They address the social determinants of health and inequalities affecting patients - factors that are often overlooked by the medical model.

How does it work?

In addition to a general practice the Bromley by Bow Centre provides several other types of service and community support. There is a children's centre, an adult education service, and debt, housing and employment advice. Visitors can access a community gym, cafe, art and gardening therapy, and healthy lifestyle courses.

How was it set up?

The centre started life as a church, which responded to the needs of its local community and became a nursery during the week. The general practice is run in a non-traditional way, with no job titles, no NHS signs, and doctors sit together with their patients looking at the information on their computer screen as partners. Solutions are not just medical, they are personalised and community based. Patients at the general practice can access services such as PoLLeN (People, Life, Landscape and Nature) which is a therapeutic horticultural project aiming to improve mental and physical wellbeing through interaction with nature.

What has it achieved?

Since the establishment of the Bromley by Bow centre

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- GPs in Tower Hamlets have been collaborating to achieve targets and work in Confederations
- Over 100 projects are now taking place there
- more than 40 social enterprises in Tower Hamlets have been developed as a result
- Despite high levels of deprivation, Tower Hamlets is now achieving the best results in the country for cholesterol and blood pressure control in patients with heart disease and diabetes.

What can we learn?

Important aspects of the project include

- connecting patients to a much broader network of support that is personalised, community-centred and beyond the usual scope of medicine
- embedding the general practice in the community facilitates the deconstruction of barriers between medical and social solutions, creates stronger bonds between patients and clinicians, and establishes a focus on the social determinants of health

Further reading

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/reports/thefutureisnow/>

https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/Ian_Jackson.pdf

https://www.bbbc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/00-PoLLen_2013FINAL.pdf