Health promotion for psoriasis patients: examining current signposting in UK health centres

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES: Psoriasis is a long term condition (LTC) associated with unhealthy living (excess alcohol, obesity, smoking and inactivity), all of which exacerbate symptoms and possibly trigger the condition. Health promotion is a key aspect of LTC management and secondary prevention and health settings are ideal places to promote healthy living information to such patients. Environmental cues can be used to nudge people into healthier lifestyle choices, a technique becoming increasingly prevalent in UK public health policy. Whether current health promotion strategies take account of these techniques is unknown. We therefore systematically examined health promotion signposting for people with psoriasis in health centre patient waiting areas, including both general and psoriasis-specific health promotion messages.

METHODS: An observation schedule was developed to record the frequency and quality of health promotion signposting in patient information leaflets and notice boards and/or posters. Content analysis was used to examine: (1) the frequency of health promotion materials; and (2) the characteristics and standard of patient materials using a series of quality indicators were developed by the study team to assess the materials.

RESULTS: The final sample included 24 health centres where 262 sources of health promotion materials were recorded (median per site = 10; range= 0-40). These included: generic posters/displays of LBC support (n = 113); and generic materials in waiting areas (n = 98). Health promotion materials were of poor quality and were poorly displayed. High quality psoriasis-specific patient materials were scarce.

CONCLUSION: We found little evidence of psoriasis-specific patient information about health promotion. Evidence about using environmental cues / techniques to promote healthier lifestyle changes in people with psoriasis does not currently inform the design and display of health promotion patient materials in standard health settings, which are prime locations for communicating important health information. This constitutes a missed opportunity to provide effective health promotion signposting.

Theory informed health promotion messages should be incorporated into high quality patient management materials. Using such approaches would contribute to bridging the gap between population- and individual-level health promotion strategies.