

Viewpoint: How GPs can build a more equal post-COVID world through health creation

By Lord Nigel Crisp on the 16 July 2020

Former NHS chief executive Lord Nigel Crisp explains why the UK needs to focus on helping people live healthier lives as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic – and the key role GPs can play.



Lord Nigel Crisp

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare some uncomfortable truths about our society. The manual workers who have been most at risk, the millions with no secure employment, the poverty and the inequality, and the way different ethnic groups have been affected. The truth is that the old normal wasn't good for many people.

We need to focus on creating health as we re-build for the future and not just on preventing disease and on services.

By creating health, I mean creating the conditions for people to be healthy and helping them to be so. It's what our parents did for us, and what good schools and teachers do, and community leaders – all of them exercising a profound and positive influence and helping create resilient, confident, capable and healthy individuals. And we need to concentrate on the causes of health and not just on the causes of disease.

Health and wellbeing in general practice

Everyone has a role here and every part of society. This is, of course, an area where general practice has always been at the forefront. There are many practices with a great tradition of focussing on health and wellbeing, salutogenesis and, most recently, social prescribing.

And today, pioneering GPs are taking this further, way beyond the practice premises. In Surrey Dr Gillian Orrow, for example, is working alongside NHS partners in Horley Primary Care Network and community healthcare, as well as teachers, local government, third sector organisations, patients and local people to co-create a vision of local health creation.

Their plans include planting a community food forest to provide free, seasonal food to local people while restoring biodiversity, establishing a community kitchen where people can learn to cook using low-cost ingredients, delivering food based educational projects in our schools, establishing better infrastructure for active travel and reducing air pollution.

New ways of working

Their way of working is even more radical. As Gillian says: ‘At its core, our partnership rests upon a desire to enhance the agency of everyone in our community to improve the health of all. Such an ambition cannot be realised within the traditional power structures of healthcare, thus this work calls for new systems of governance.

‘We have established a partnership which embraces listening (to the needs and aspirations of individuals and communities), appropriate participation (of a diverse range of community members), equivalence (recognising the value of everyone's voice and needs irrespective of status), and the sharing of power and decision-making.’

There is a wider movement developing, involving professionals from many fields as well as health – housing, social care, education, architecture, planning and others – and we all have much to learn from them.

The New NHS Alliance has worked with leaders in the field to create a set of five simple health-creating practices – listening and responding, truth-telling, focusing on strengths, self-organising and power-shifting – as described in the box below.

We need high quality services and we need well-organised programmes of prevention and health promotion.

And we also need to embrace the broader more holistic view offered by health creation and work together to build a healthy and health-creating society.

- Nigel Crisp is a crossbench peer and was NHS chief executive and permanent secretary of the Department of Health 2000 to 2006. His latest book *Health is made at home, hospitals are for repairs*, is available from www.healthismadeathome.uk Details of a series of webinars on building a healthy and health-creating society are also on this website.

New NHS Alliance's health-creating practices

Listening and responding: Effective, genuine listening to the reality of people's and communities' lives is essential. As is acting differently upon what is heard, and not just reverting to the established systems. Listening can also help to build trust and being listened to can also be therapeutic in itself.

Truth-telling: When people and practitioners identify and acknowledge what holds them back from creating health, rather than treating illness, they can start to get to the root causes of problems and solutions. This can be a challenge to the system.

Strengths focus: Health creation happens when attention is paid to what people can do for themselves or others. Making people aware of their strengths and finding opportunities for them to employ them unlocks their potential and builds confidence for creating health.

Self-organising: Helping people to connect meaningfully with others makes it possible for them to find solutions and take actions together. They are more likely to find purpose in their lives and this drives wellness. Over time, people become less reliant on health and care services.

Power-shifting: Lasting health creation happens when the features above result in a power shift from practitioners to people and communities. When people's expertise and strengths are recognised and valued, they can make good decisions, take action and have an influence over things that affect them. Services can then adapt and respond accordingly.

More information [on this can be found here](#).