



Mental health empowerment through reading

NHS Lothian Charity awarded £4,877 through its Small Grants Programme to establish a mental health and wellbeing book library within the Blood Borne Viruses (BBV) Clinic at the Western General Hospital. Access to support is particularly important for this group of patients as National evidence demonstrates that blood borne viruses and infectious diseases disproportionately affect people living in deprived circumstances, many facing financial hardship, stigma, social exclusion, unstable housing, or other barriers, all of which can adversely affect mental wellbeing. The library also offers an alternative means of support for patients who may be unwilling or unable to engage with formal mental health services due to concerns about stigma or anxiety. The library was introduced to empower patients and their families with the knowledge, confidence, skills, and resources they need to make informed decisions and take an active role in managing their own health and wellbeing.



Staff with book cabinet in the waiting area

48%

of books have been
distributed to patients and
their families in the first year.



Some of the books included in the library

How the library works

Approximately 70 books were selected by Joy, BBV Specialist Mental Health Nurse, and other colleagues covering a range of topics relevant to the patient group, including anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, sleep difficulties, low self-esteem, OCD, anger management and addiction. Many of the books use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques that align with evidence-based approaches commonly used across NHS mental health services.

To maximise access, a selection of books are displayed in a glass cabinet within the clinic waiting area and can be requested confidentially through reception staff or provided directly by clinicians to support ongoing therapeutic work. In line with NHS Lothian infection control policies, books are given to patients to take home and keep. To help sustain the library, each book includes a note encouraging patients who found it helpful, and are able to do so, to purchase a replacement copy and donate it back to the Service for the benefit of future patients. Although no patients have yet been able to do this, one patient kindly donated £10 as a gesture of appreciation after receiving the book.



By providing reliable self-help books, the project has improved access to support, reduced barriers associated with stigma and financial hardship, increased understanding of mental health challenges, and enabled patients to continue managing their wellbeing beyond clinical appointments."

– Joy, BBV Specialist Mental Health Nurse, RIDU



Benefits for patients

Improved access to effective, evidence-based resources

Many patients seek mental health information from websites and other online sources, where advice can be inaccurate, conflicting, or misleading. This library provides access to trusted, practitioner-recommended information, practical self-help tools, and CBT-based techniques to support common mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, grief, and trauma. By helping patients better understand their symptoms and experiences, the books offer reliable guidance and coping strategies while patients await formal psychological support. Joy shared: *"One patient reported that reading a book helped them recognise their symptoms and understand that seeking support was an important next step for them."*

Greater empowerment to self-manage wellbeing

The books in the library enabled patients to continue learning and reflecting outside clinical appointments by reading information at their own pace, revisiting advice after appointments, writing notes and reflections and referring to self-help techniques contained in the books. As well as providing support, the books are valuable for individuals who struggle to absorb information during appointments or who experience distress, anxiety or dissociation during consultations and provides a self-help resource between contacts with the Service.

Reduced financial barriers

Many patients accessing the Service experience socioeconomic disadvantage, financial hardship and health inequalities and would be unlikely or unable to purchase the books themselves. Providing books ensures that financial circumstances do not prevent individuals from accessing high-quality wellbeing resources. Joy shared:

"Patients were often surprised and delighted to receive this form of additional support, describing it as thoughtful and unexpected from the NHS."

Benefits for families

Empowering family members to support mental wellbeing

The library helps family members gain a better understanding of mental health difficulties and how to support patients. Through access to practical information and guidance in the books, family members feel more confident in their supporting role, while also becoming more aware of the importance of maintaining their own wellbeing and seeking support when needed. Joy shared: *"A husband of a patient visiting the unit asked for a book to support his daughter who has mental health issues and also stated that this would benefit him."*

Benefits for staff

Increased ability to support patients

Staff from the Service reported the library allowed them to provide practical, tangible support and that they could recommend books with confidence because the content had been professionally vetted. One staff member shared: *"The ability to hand a patient an appropriate resource rather than simply suggesting they find one online or independently was valuable."*

Improved professional development

The books enhanced staff knowledge and skills with some used to support staff learning and professional development around psychological approaches such as CBT to enhance patient care. Joy shared: *"About 4 staff members a month have been accessing the book resource which is great as we didn't have this facility before."*