

Patients sent to the library for help with mental health

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PATIENTS with prescriptions are bypassing their local pharmacy - in favour of the library.

Doctors in the Lothians are prescribing self-help books to treat conditions such as mild depression, anxiety and eating disorders.

Following a successful trial, the scheme is being launched across East Lothian on Monday to coincide with the start of National Suicide Prevention Week.

Edinburgh City Council is also considering introducing the project, and a similar one has already been successful in West Lothian.

GPs, psychiatrists and counselors like Chris Scott in East Lothian have already written 217 prescriptions for books on a recommended list. There is also a special DVD aimed at young people suffering from depression.

Steven Wray, East Lothian Council's health improvement officer, said: "We've had some very positive feedback from library users and some of the prescribers. It's aimed at people with mild to moderate mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, bereavement or trauma.

"It could be a treatment on its own, or it could be along with anti-depressants or counseling. It would complement the other treatment."

Patients do not have to be a member of a library to use the service, and librarians have all been given special training, including issues about confidentiality.

Doctors and other healthcare professionals were consulted in drawing up the list of recommended books. They include *Mind over Mood* by Christine A Padesky and Dennis Greenberger and *A Special Scar: The Experiences of People Bereaved by Suicide* by Alison Wertheimer.

Dr William Riddle, a consultant psychiatrist at Herdman Flat Hospital in Haddington, said: "So far the patients have been entirely positive.

"I'm very keen to support it. Nationally, there's concern about the increase in the rate of prescribing anti-depressants. It's very easy to prescribe medication now, but in some cases it's not the most appropriate thing.

The East Lothian trial was run in Musselburgh, Prestonpans, Tranent and Ormiston libraries.

Dionne Howie, a senior assistant at Musselburgh Library said: "It seems to be going very well. Nobody seems to be embarrassed, but if they are, they can ask a friend or relative to come in and pick it up for them.

"The books are in with the rest of our medical health books, but they have a special sticker on them. If they're out on loan, we can arrange a free inter-library loan for them."

John Boyce, an NHS public health practitioner with East Lothian Community Health Partnership, said: "This is intended as one of a range of self-help opportunities for East Lothian residents offered in parallel to other support and treatment options."

An Edinburgh city council spokesman said it is currently working with NHS Lothian to develop a system for using books as a means of assisting those with mental health problems.

West Lothian Council introduced a similar scheme in March, and a total of 606 books have already been prescribed. A spokesman said: "Early indications from our library service staff suggests that the Books on Prescription scheme has been very well received, and we will be looking at ways to expand."