



The Impact of Providing One-to-One Coaching For General Practitioners

Beyond Coaching

February – March 2017

***“I was on the cusp of leaving.
I now see at least a short to medium term future” GP***

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Health and social care are facing unprecedented demands. Across the world, healthcare systems are seeking solutions to deliver improved outcomes with reduced resources. The Five Year Forward View sets out a vision for the future focused on new models of care, with an emphasis on more integration and place-based working. Demands on primary care have never been greater. GPs are at the heart of 'place' and essential in creating a sustainable health and social care system. The General Practice Forward View recognises the challenges and identifies ambitious plans to initiate significant improvements.

In order for them to be part of the solution to the current challenges, GPs need to be able to find space to think, develop resilience and manage themselves, their practice staff and their current working situations. We were commissioned to deliver a short programme offering GPs the opportunity to receive two confidential one-to-one coaching sessions with a professional coach. Coaching was identified as a means to offer support that is forward-looking, action-orientated, positive and personal. The aim of the programme was to provide time and space to think in a way that supported them to make positive changes and, not only to survive the current environment, but to flourish and enable greater levels of retention.

2. Findings

During February and March 2017 a total of 317 GPs participated in the coaching sessions. 45 Beyond coaches across England delivered a total of 632, 90 minute sessions. Overall, 743 personal goals were identified; the most common goals that GPs chose to work on were: practice leadership, developing clarity about career plans and direction, improving personal effectiveness and efficiency, and reducing stress and anxiety.

After two coaching sessions, GPs reported the following significant improvements:

- +40% Developed clarity about career plans and direction**
- +40% Improved my personal effectiveness and efficiency**
- +39% Reduced stress and anxiety**
- +35% Developed personal insight and are managing themselves more effectively and with confidence**
- +34% 'Working on a larger canvass'**
- +34% Improved the effectiveness of my communication**
- +34% Planning and managing change (external)**
- +34% Planning and managing change (internal)**
- +33% Practice Leadership**
- 26% Reduction in the likelihood of leaving General Practice**
- 22% Reduction in the likelihood of a career change**
- 16% Reduction in the likelihood of reducing hours in General Practice**

It is important to note that reported goals in coaching are generally the *presenting* area that the client/coachee wishes to work on. If we use an 'Iceberg' analogy, what we see in goal setting at the outset is the tip of the iceberg; the real work for the client is what lies underneath the thinking and behaviours, i.e. the values, habits, mind-sets, perceptions and beliefs. It is the exploration of these 'deeper' levels that bring about a shift in confidence, resilience, ownership and motivation.

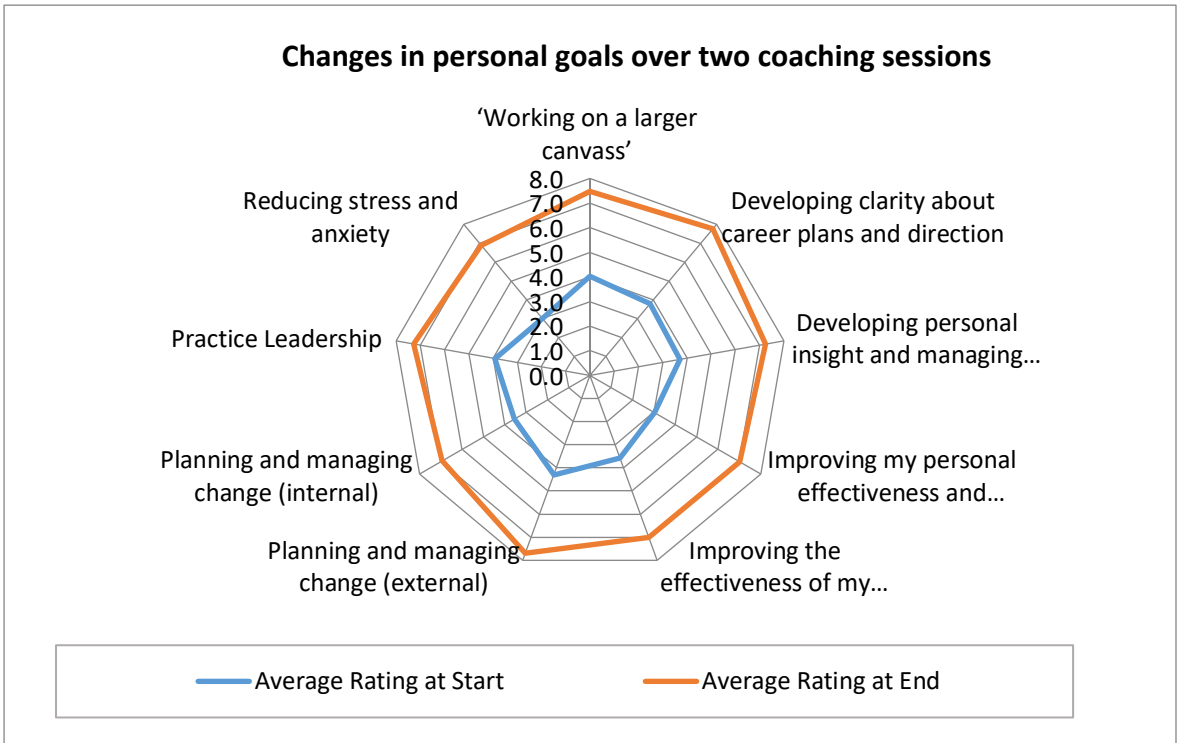
Both the challenge and success of this coaching programme was to unlock this level of insight and thinking in a very short timeframe for GPs, regardless of what they were working on. Our experience shows that with more sessions over a longer period of time coachees are able to learn and embed strategies that enable sustainable change in thinking and behaviours that serve them well in the longer term.

Participants were asked what, if any, behaviour changes they had made as a result of the coaching, and what impact this had had on themselves, others, and patients. Many reported changes that had positively impacted others. For example:

Behaviour change	Impact on self	Impact on others	Impact on patients
“My knowledge regarding leadership and collaboration has improved and feel I have a clearer plan in order to progress to partnership at the right time in my career. I am more conscious to put myself first when I can in order to achieve a better balance.”	“I feel calmer and better rested in order to work more effectively. I am trying to eat better and get more rest either side of work and looking after my 4 children.”	“I am able to maintain good relationships with colleagues and patients without showing any stress as I am managing it better.”	“I am focusing on not running late and completing concise consultations to aid my stress levels and leave on time when needed. Patients are still receiving good care but I am managing them better and booking follow up appointments when needed.”

GPs reported positive improvements in all their personal goals after two coaching sessions.

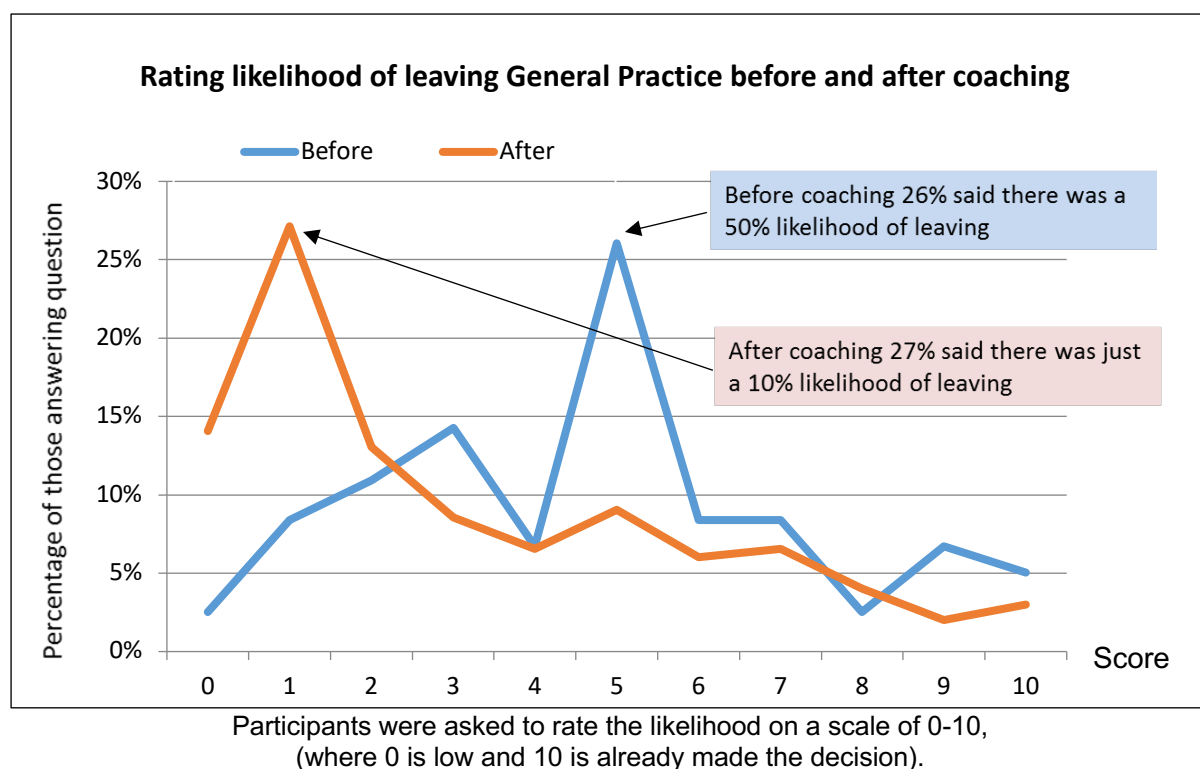
The chart below shows the average scores out of 10 for GPs' personal goals before and after coaching.



GPs were less likely to leave General Practice after two coaching sessions.

Before the coaching, the GPs were asked to rate their likelihood of leaving General Practice. 37% (119) of the cohort chose to answer the question, of whom 57% (68) rated themselves 50% or more likely to leave. At the end of the coaching, 64% (202) chose to answer the question and 31% (61) rated themselves 50% or more likely to leave. This is a **26% decrease in those rating themselves 50% or more likely to leave** (who chose to answer the question).

The graph below illustrates this reduction with a spike showing 26% rating themselves as 50% likely to leave before the coaching; and the spike of 27% scoring 10% likelihood after two coaching sessions.



3. Reflections and observations

The programme offered two 90-minute sessions over a 7-week period. In coaching terms, this is an extremely short intervention, both in terms of the number of sessions and the time over which coaching was delivered. Despite the brevity of the programme, it delivered a very positive impact for GPs. This is evidenced by the extensive qualitative and quantitative data gathered. The use of highly experienced, highly trained professional coaches, who themselves have operated at senior levels and had a deep insight and understanding of the UK Health & Care system, along with other sector experience, enabled the sessions to deliver high impact in a short time.

It has been an enormous privilege to work with this highly intelligent and dedicated group of GPs. We have experienced first-hand the commitment they have to their work and their patients. Some GPs, however, are struggling in the current work environment to 'see the wood for the trees', are stressed due to heavy workload, concerned about what is happening around them and are worried about future sustainability for themselves and their practices.

The experience of the coaches working with GPs suggested that they fell along a 'spectrum' in relation to how they were responding to the current challenges in general practice, which can be divided into three broad categories:

1. Not coping well.
2. Coping and working to maintain sustainability of the practice.
3. Running sustainable practices and looking for wider development and growth.

Coaches working with the GPs observed that it was not unusual for some GPs to be working 10-12 hour days on a regular basis, during which they do not take rest breaks or eat during the day. From Sunday morning, many begin to worry about whether they will cope in the week ahead. High levels of stress and anxiety were not uncommon across the 3 categories.

Many of the GPs find their day-to-day work to be long and inflexible, with patients and administration wearing them down physically and mentally. They feel 'stuck' with limited choice and are concerned that external changes will make things worse.

Coaching encouraged the GPs to identify personal goals and these largely reflected where they were on the 'spectrum' described above, and what they most needed and wanted to work on. What is evident from the findings is that, wherever they were on the spectrum, coaching provided a hugely positive experience, with everyone making significant progress against their goals.

Coaching created an impact through:

- facilitating quality time to think, to enable them to have their mindsets and perceptions challenged.
- building resilience so that GPs can think, diagnose and treat even better, and work with the wider system.
- moving GPs who feel 'stuck' with no options or choice (victim) to 'empowered'.
- clarifying areas of influence and concern – accepting what they can't change and working with what they can.
- unlocking motivation - aligning their intellect and energy to what they are passionate about.
- building confidence to want to engage with and make changes, and to make better decisions for themselves, their practice and patients.

The results of this coaching programme demonstrate consistent improvements on all goals. For many GPs, coaching helped them to gain personal insight, build self-confidence, and improve personal effectiveness. For those in the first category, this leads to a greater sense of control and improved resilience. For GPs who were in the middle of the spectrum, coaching enabled them to work on improving their personal effectiveness, work-life balance, relationships and practice leadership. For those who were already in a confident place and running sustainable practices, the coaching provided opportunities to increase their personal effectiveness, leadership and relationships and consider how they wished to step onto a broader canvas and take more of a role in system leadership.

The coaching was not directed or focused on increasing retention in general practice. However, it is clear from the results that providing time and space to think, facilitated and challenged by highly experienced professional coaches, had a positive impact upon individuals' levels of confidence, ability to manage themselves and their workload, and, as a consequence, shifted their sense of the current situation, and reduced their likelihood of leaving general practice or reducing their hours.

The fundamental coaching journey of discovery and awareness, to choice, commitment, action, and in turn, to learning, is very powerful. In common with other professionals, many

of the GPs have lost sight of what makes them tick and what is important to them. Growing their awareness of their values and purpose, helping them to see their strengths and capabilities, and opening up choices for them is empowering and confidence building.

Coaching supports people to take ownership of their own life, and develop choices and options. Once they have that level of 'mobility', then the individual issues that they bring to coaching are straightforward for them to resolve.

4. Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of this programme and the challenges and ambitions of the Five Year Forward View Next Steps and GP Forward View, there is evidence that coaching is highly impactful for GPs, and offers crucial support to them in taking their place in a sustainable health and social care system.

With the wider picture in mind there are three levels of concurrent support recommended to enable the whole system to work more effectively.

- **The individual GP** – unlock the passion and energy of these highly capable individuals and workforce – coach them to provide space and time to think – enable them to build their own resilience to prevent stress and burnout, tap into their intrinsic motivation and empower them to make the change they want and need to see.
- **The Practice** – develop practice leadership – provide team coaching for Partners and Practice Managers to improve the effectiveness of partnerships and relationships to enable them to lead their organisation well and be able to talk 'as one' in order to work with other practices at scale and develop new models of care in 'place' settings.
- **General Practice in 'place' settings** – provide 'place' leads with coaching and training, using tried and tested tools for collaboration, to equip these leaders of 'place' with the mind-set and skills of a facilitator and convenor to lead new models of integrated care.

4.1 A coaching programme to support GPs, particularly in relation to increasing resilience, retention and the development of 'place' and integration.

It is recommended that:

- coaching be offered more widely to GPs and General Practice
 - four sessions of 90 mins be offered over 4- 6 months in order to deliver and embed sustainable positive change in thinking and approach
- two additional sessions be offered specifically to the group that have begun their coaching journey in this 'tester' programme. The GPs on the programme all made positive changes and realised benefits for themselves and others. For many, it was the start of a journey, which unlocked for them fundamental issues that they have started to work on. Two further sessions could enable progress to be consolidated, changes embedded and further improvements made.

4.2 Follow-up evaluation

- It is recommended that a follow-up evaluation of this cohort is conducted at 12 months. Coaching facilitates sustainable change. Since the agenda and actions are owned and driven by the coachee, further evaluation would assess the level of sustainable change and identify areas for further support and development.

4.3 Other support to GPs and General Practice

Wider support recommended:

- Team coaching for partners of practices – to develop effective relationships and strong leadership ‘as one’ to enable sustainable and effective practices who can work well with other practices and in turn with the wider system to integrate care.
- Resilience development for GPs – equipping GPs with techniques and know how to better manage stress and achieve a better work-life balance.
- Coaching for Practice Managers who are often isolated, and sometimes ill-equipped to manage the practice/partners and staff.
- Collaborative Leadership development for ‘place’ leads, equipping them with the tools and mind-set for leading integration of health and social care at grass routes.

“I was surprised by the chain reaction of events since starting the sessions. I feel more positive and in control. It would be useful to have further top up sessions and make this available to more of my colleagues.”