Your contact with Gypsy/Travellers

NHS Ayrshire & Arran covers 3 local authority areas. At the moment, there are 2 permanent Gypsy/Travellers Sites and work ongoing to look at securing a transient site. Aligned to the 3 local authority areas, NHS Ayrshire & Arran has 3 public health nurses with Gypsy/Travellers as part of their remit.

Across NHS Ayrshire & Arran, there is a very strong partnership working ethic and this is enhanced as a result of the good relationship the Site Managers have with the residents. Often when a new family comes into the area, the site manager will contact the local health visitor or public health nurse and invite them to meet with the family. Likewise should a Gypsy/Traveller person from the site have any health concerns, the Site Manager acts as the conduit and will organise for the relevant health professional to see them.

The health visitor, public health nurse and midwifery team regularly attend the sites to provide advice and guidance to the families, as well as supporting the site managers should they come across unauthorised encampments. The NHS staff deliver health promotion activities such as immunisation, oral health, diet, general development expectations etc. In South Ayrshire the site manager often has student nurses attend the site to encourage awareness raising, as well as promoting the health held record.

The partnership working extends beyond the boundaries of NHS Ayrshire & Arran when, often due to the transient nature of Gypsy/Travellers communities, a family will leave the area and contact is made cross border to ensure the family receives the appropriate support and access to services as necessary. An example of this was a woman who had had twin babies but left the area before the midwife was able to explain immunisation and other health related tests. The site manager in that area was aware they were coming into Ayrshire and therefore contacted our site manager who was able to get the family in contact with the health visitor to ensure the babies received all the necessary immunisations and tests.

Further contact with the Gypsy/Travellers community on the sites is made with a variety of health care professionals when engaging and consulting on other areas such as service changes etc. The Equality and Diversity Officer has visited the South Ayrshire site on a number of occasions such as ensuring the Gypsy/Travellers community were included in the development of the Single Equality Scheme and also to find out how they felt about providing their equalities data to the NHS. On both of these occasions, the community had concerns about other health related issues which the E&D Officer was able to answer or follow up with additional information.

Any policies or practice guidelines relating to Gypsy/Travellers that you have, including any aimed at other organisations/groups

NHS Ayrshire & Arran do not have a specific policy relating to Gypsy/Travellers. However, in line with the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010, our impact assessment process does include consideration of the needs of Gypsy/Travellers and any resulting potential disproportionate impacts on them.
The impact assessment process has highlighted some areas where there is little evidence base and therefore engagement has taken place to rectify this. Through effective partnership working with the Site Managers at our local authorities, consultation and engagement with the Gypsy/Travellers has helped to inform areas of work to ensure our services are inclusive.

An example of this was the South West Scotland Breast Screening Service which NHS Ayrshire & Arran took the lead on with colleagues from NHS Dumfries & Galloway. The impact assessment process highlighted some issues for women to attend for screening and the relevant practitioners took on board better ways to ensure awareness raising and women’s attendance.

Any specific training or awareness-raising you undertake in relation to Gypsy/Travellers

NHS Ayrshire & Arran provides Equality and Diversity Training for staff which includes Gypsy/Travellers within the race protected characteristic. The training is undertaken using a blended learning approach, both face-to-face and eLearning, to allow access to as many staff as possible.

As well as the above mentioned training, NHS Ayrshire & Arran worked in partnership with East Ayrshire Council to deliver Equality Week from 3-10 March 2012. As part of this week, a specific session on Gypsy/Travellers, facilitated by Shelter, was held and staff were invited to attend this training.

What difficulties Gypsy/Travellers have accessing your services/support (or those provided on your behalf or in collaboration with you or by other bodies in your field) and what you have done to address any such difficulties.

As outlined under question one, due to the transient nature of the Gypsy/Traveller community, ensuring follow up appointments e.g. for immunisation / child health issues are attended can be difficult. Likewise Gypsy/Travellers present at Accident and Emergency rather than attend a GP appointment (as many are not registered) and asking them to attend an appointment in unfamiliar surroundings may result in non-attendance. To support this work contact with the Site Managers is made and they try to pass on the information via the Traveller’s Site Manager Association Scotland.

Within NHS Ayrshire & Arran, many of the Gypsy/Travellers resident on the sites are registered with a local GP. However, those who are on unauthorised encampments can often be registered on a temporary resident basis to ensure appropriate care and treatment is available.

Screening programmes can be difficult if people are not registered with a GP. However, promotion of the screening programmes is undertaken by the public health nurses and local authority Liaison Officers to try to ensure everyone who is eligible can access them.

One particular area which is difficult for the NHS to engage with the Gypsy/Travellers is sexual health initiatives such as contraception and HPV immunisation. There are very sensitive cultural issues within the Traveller community regarding sexual health and the girls who fall within the age category for contraception and HPV advice may be married, having had only one sexual relationship. Our public health nurses are available to discuss these issues should they arise.
I hope this response provides you with an understanding of the work that NHS Ayrshire & Arran, and in partnership with the local authorities, undertakes to ensure the needs of Gypsy/Travellers is met.

John G Burns
Chief Executive
NHS Ayrshire & Arran
6 July 2012