

## East of England Obesity Network

Association for the Study of Obesity  
On behalf of Public Health England

Annual Report, February 2014

### 1. Background

The memorandum of understanding between Public Health England and the ASO was renewed to cover the term 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. This agreement covers the coordination of the East of England Obesity Network, and includes the following deliverables:

- One full day conference; Two half day meetings
- Administrative support for all events
- Promotion of network and events
- East of England Obesity Network page on ASO website
- “Fast-track” membership to become ASO members

#### 2.1 Coordination of the Network

Dr Amy Ahern (AA; Investigator Scientist, MRC Human Nutrition Research, Cambridge) agreed to act as regional coordinator for a second term. AA is the main point of contact for the network, maintains the mailing list, sends out notices of regional and national events and opportunities, and organises specific network meetings. She is supported in this role by Catherine Stone (CS) and Beckie Lang in the central ASO office and the ASO trustees. The EoE regional webpage <http://www.aso.org.uk/events/east-of-england-obesity-network/> includes details of past and future events, and encourages those in the region to join the East of England Obesity Network mailing list and the ASO. Meeting slides can also be downloaded from this site if members are happy for them to be hosted there.

#### 2.2 Network Membership

Network members are typically public health/ health care professionals working in obesity, but the network also includes research academics, industry representatives and members of local government. The membership of the EoE network is maintained via a mailing list, and the membership took a significant fall following the restructuring of the NHS and Public Health (a large number of people changed their job and/or email address). However, we continue to have a strong core membership, the wider list is rebuilding, and the broad and varied meetings means membership grows with each meeting. Members are influential in determining the theme of meetings and suggesting content, and the coordinator has maintained an inclusive ethos enabling members to present at meetings.

### **2.3 2013/14 Meetings**

The first half-day meeting for this year was held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at MRC Human Nutrition Research in Cambridge. The theme was Commissioning Obesity Interventions in a New Public Health Era, and was arranged in response to specific requests from network members to try and answer some of the remaining uncertainty around commissioning responsibilities. Catherine Goodall, Obesity Lead for PHE in the East of England presented on the role of PHE. Dr David Johns, MRC Human Nutrition Research, presented findings from his recent systematic review on Behavioural Weight Management Programmes, which formed the basis of the recent NICE guidance for Adults. Daniel Eve, NHS England, presented on Tier 4 Specialised Commissioning for Bariatric Surgery. A total of 35 delegates attended the meeting and the meeting generated considerable discussion and numerous new connections between members.

The second half-day meeting was on Obesity Interventions: the importance of supporting mental health. Again, this meeting was put together in response to interest and desire for information from network members. The meeting was held on 13<sup>th</sup> January at UEA Sportspark in Norwich. AA presented an overview of the importance of support in weight management interventions, including some of her own research. Jo Simister presented on personal and social factors in seeking a healthier lifestyle, focussing on her ethnographic work in Hackbridge. Our colleagues at BEAT presented on their Department of Health funded Emotional Overeating Support Groups, which they are rolling out in the region. We also trialled a new session format of allowing network members to present case studies relevant to the meeting theme for discussion. Dr Carly Hughes presented two cases she had been struggling with and the discussion generated was lively and constructive. 30 delegates attended the meeting and feedback was extremely positive.

Following discussion with PHE, it was decided that the full day meeting will be held in April/May, so as not to clash with the ASO national meeting in March, which network members are able to attend, and not to be too close to the recent PHE meeting. The meeting will be held in Cambridge as this is a central location considered accessible for most members and there is concern attendance is reduced in the more remote areas of the region. AA will consult with CG regarding the development of the programme.

### **2.3 Feedback from the Network**

Feedback about the content and format of the meetings has been overwhelmingly positive. Members value the opportunity to learn about best practice and new developments and to network with regional colleagues. Many delegates report having taken information back to their local practice, or having made a connection with a new colleague with common interests which they have followed up after the meeting. A number of practitioners and policy makers have also used the event to make contact with academic researchers who can assist with designing the evaluation of their interventions. Below are examples of support for the network, sent to us by members.

*“The eastern region ASO meetings play a vital role in linking clinicians with an interest in Obesity and sharing best practice. As well as interesting presentations they offer the only opportunity to network with clinicians in this area. It is especially pertinent as obesity is a complex problem requiring multidisciplinary input and these meeting support that.*

*The last meeting on psychological aspects with case discussion was well attended, and led to sharing of expertise and clinical protocols.*

*Community based practitioners are at especial risk of therapeutic isolation , and the meetings provide education and support as well as facilitating the development of clear pathways within the region.*

*The fact that people travel so far to attend these meetings illustrates the high value put on them by clinicians.*

*Dr Amy Ahern takes great care to choose topics of interest to clinicians, and is an excellent ambassador for the ASO.”*

*Dr Carly Hughes*

*GP and Bariatric Physician, Fakenham Weight Management Service (Tier 3 MDT service)*

*“[We were] talking about the event all the way home, we both feel very motivated to bring something into the Trust. We have also got some contacts to see what may be available in our area from the event.”*

*East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust*

*Thank you for arranging a really interesting meeting yesterday and I am very sorry I had to leave early to get to another appointment.... As regards attendance at the Networks please can you clarify if there are any criteria applicable? We have been trying to set up a Norfolk Network to develop a co-ordinated pathway however upon reflection I think it may be more useful to become part of this Network instead. I can think of a number of local clinicians and service providers who have a keen interest in this agenda and who would be particularly keen to attend at a Norwich venue and/or be included on the mailing list.*

*Public Health Officer, NHS Norfolk and Waveney*