



East Sussex MSK
Community Partnership

ESMSK Newsletter August 2026



East Sussex MSK Community Partnership

ESMSK August 2026 newsletter.

It has been a particularly warm summer in East Sussex, so we thought it was the perfect opportunity to bring you some updates hot off the press from East Sussex MSK.

In this issue, you'll find updates on our new Community Pain Pathway, developments to our Physiotherapy Self-Referral Pathway, an overview of the learning from our recent GIRFT Work and Health programme, and a useful FAQ on our Spinal Advanced Practitioners to help answer common patient questions.

This month:

- ☐ **A New Community Musculoskeletal Pain Service for East Sussex**
- ☐ **Physiotherapy Self-Referral**
 - New self-referral format - what happens when patients are excluded
 - Resources for digital screens
- ☐ **GIRFT Case Studies**
- ☐ **FAQ - What is a Spinal Advanced Physiotherapist Practitioner?**
- ☐ **Staying in Touch**



**East Sussex MSK
Community Partnership**

A New Community Musculoskeletal Pain Service for East Sussex

We are delighted to share that East Sussex MSK Community Partnership (ESMSK) has been given the green light to launch a new musculoskeletal (MSK) community pain service for the population of East Sussex from 1 November 2026.

This is an exciting and important development for local people, strengthening the wider MSK offer across East Sussex and supporting a shared ambition to provide more joined-up, personalised and community-based care. The new service will complement and integrate with existing community MSK services under the leadership of ESMSK, ensuring that people living with persistent pain can access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

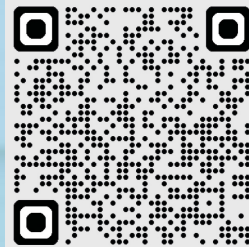
Following a successful procurement process, the service will be delivered by Here (Care Unbound Limited). Here are an established social enterprise (not-for-profit) who bring a strong track record in community healthcare delivery, service transformation and innovation. Here already work in the Sussex system delivering MSK services in partnership with Sussex Community Foundation Trust (SCFT) in Brighton and Hove and West Sussex and are particularly well known for their innovations in personalised care and new models of delivery including Community Appointment Days. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, Here describes its purpose as creating “exceptional care, for everyone” and works with partners to deliver outstanding personalised healthcare for whole communities.

Here’s approach to developing new models of healthcare aligns strongly with our ambition to deliver a modern, responsive and integrated community MSK service that supports people to live well, build confidence and access care that is shaped around what matters most to them.

This launch represents a positive step forward for MSK services in East Sussex. It provides an opportunity to celebrate partnership working, strengthen integration across local pathways, and build a service that reflects the needs of our communities now and into the future. We look forward to working with Here, wider local partners, clinicians, stakeholders and people with lived experience as we move through mobilisation and towards launch on 1 November 2026. Further information will be issued in due course to ensure optimal access for all suitable patients.

Matthew Carr
Partnership Director – ESMSK

Physiotherapy Self-Referral



Safeguarding and Exclusions – Physiotherapy Self-referral

We are making a number of improvements to our online Physiotherapy Self-Referral process to ensure patients receive the right information and support as quickly as possible.

These changes include:

- Enabling patients to access relevant information and advice more quickly.
- Introducing earlier screening for safeguarding questions, so that patients who are not suitable for our service can be identified sooner and provided with immediate advice and signposting.
- Reducing duplication within the form and streamlining the referral process.
- Reviewing the wording throughout the form to ensure it uses clear, accessible language that can be understood by a wide range of patients.

As part of these changes, we will notify GP practices when a patient attempts to self-refer but does not meet the criteria to progress through the referral process.

This will typically occur when:

- The patient reports symptoms that have been present for less than six weeks and therefore fall outside our self-referral criteria at this stage; or
- The patient reports symptoms that may indicate a more urgent condition requiring medical assessment, in which case they will be advised to contact NHS 111, attend an Urgent Treatment Centre, or present A&E as appropriate.

These notifications are provided for information only. They are intended to inform you that your patient has attempted to access our service, explain why the self-referral was not progressed, and advise you of any signposting that has been provided. No further action will be taken by our service in relation to these self-referrals; however, there may be circumstances in which you feel it is appropriate to review or follow up with the patient.

Physiotherapy Self-Referral



Materials for your practice – Physiotherapy Self-Referral

We've put together a selection of self-referral posters and digital assets for practices to use in waiting rooms, community noticeboards and digital screens. We hope these resources make it easier to raise awareness of the Physiotherapy Self-Referral service and help patients access the right support quickly and directly.

The materials are available below and can be downloaded, displayed and shared freely within your practice.

[Digital Screen Poster – Classic QR](#)

[GRIFT Digital Screen Poster – Work and Health](#)

[ESMSK Self-Referral Poster 2026](#)

[GIRFT Self-Referral Poster 2026](#)

GIRFT Case Studies - Now published

During the first half of 2026, we've been working with **Get It Right First Time** (GIRFT) funding to deliver a Work and Health programme across East Sussex.

The programme focused on supporting people who's musculoskeletal (MSK) condition was affecting their ability to stay in work, return to work or seek employment. We also worked with employers across East Sussex to better understand their needs and improve access to the right support at the right time.

Through engagement with businesses, local organisations and patients, we gathered insight into the challenges faced by working people with MSK conditions. This informed the development of new resources, strengthened signposting, and trialled changes to pathways aimed at identifying and supporting people earlier.

MSK conditions remain one of the leading causes of sickness absence in the UK, affecting around one in three people. **The project highlighted the value of early conversations, timely access to support and effective signposting, helping people remain in work wherever possible and reducing the impact of MSK conditions on daily life.**

The programme has generated valuable learning that will continue to influence service development, including greater use of self-management resources, improved triage and signposting, and opportunities to utilise digital platforms to support patients while waiting for treatment. The relationships established through the project will also enable ongoing collaboration with employers, community organisations and VCSE networks beyond the funding period.

We have published two case studies summarising the programme, key learning and resources developed through the project. We would encourage practices to review and share these resources with patients where appropriate, and to make use of the resources within their own teams to support workplace wellbeing and self-management.

[GIRFT-Work-and-Health-Rapid-Access-Clinics-East-Sussex-Case-Study](#)

[MSK-Work-And-Health-Community-Engagement-Case-Study](#)



What is a Spinal Advanced Physiotherapist Practitioner?

A spinal APP is a physiotherapist who has specialised in spinal assessment, management and care.

Training includes post-graduate qualifications such as a Master's degree and / or specialised training with the spinal surgical consultant team. APPs are accountable to the Health and Care Professions Council. APPs are required to keep up to date with evidence-based practice, role specific competencies and to demonstrate their ongoing capability, usually in a portfolio format.

What services do spinal Advanced Physiotherapist Practitioner offer?

The APP team work in the spinal orthopaedic outpatient department for adult patients with spinal conditions where there is a question as to whether their spinal problem may warrant surgery or to consider alternative management options if spinal pains have persisted despite traditional treatments such as physiotherapy.

What to expect if you have been referred to see a spinal Advanced Physiotherapist Practitioner?

The APP will get a comprehensive history of your symptoms followed by an examination of your back, after which they will discuss with you whether they feel further scans are needed and what your management options will be. APPs can request MRI, XRs, and bloods tests but treatments will vary dependent upon whether your symptoms included referred pain into your arms or legs or if pain is solely in the back. Most people with spinal problems do not need surgery.

It must be recognised that persistent spinal pain, particularly where there is no referred symptoms into the arms or legs is complex and often poorly understood from a medical perspective. Spine pains without referred pain into the arms or legs are often not explained with MRI scans (Outside of rare and specific conditions such as fractures). Consequently, many people do not need MRI scans, and your APP will explain this if they feel this is relevant to your own individual circumstance.

Further Information

The infographic below demonstrates that many people in the population without any symptoms often have things like disc bulges on MRI scans and therefore, the current UK guidance is that MRI scans are not recommended for many people with spinal pain.

See ["BestMSK Spinal MRI – Clinician Advice"](#) and ["BestMSK Spinal MRI – Patient Advice"](#)

Adam Slater,
Advanced Practitioner Physiotherapist



Stay Connected with ESMSK on Facebook and LinkedIn

We'd love to keep in touch! You can now follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn, where we share regular updates on:

- Community events and where you can find us
- New initiatives and service updates
- Opening times and contact information
- Tips and resources to support your health and wellbeing

It's also a great way to engage with us and see how we're working with local communities.

👉 Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/ESMSKCP>

👉 LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/esmsk/>

ESMSK Engagement Lead direct email:

David.Bullivent@nhs.net