

# Choice *or* Chance?

Ending the information lottery

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**15%**

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eating disorders  
and knew how  
to help.

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**beat**<sup>TM</sup>  
beating eating disorders

# Choice or chance?

The NHS Constitution promises a health service based on choice, information and respect – and **beat** welcomes this commitment. However – for people affected by eating disorders – their experience of the health service too often falls far short of this.

**beat** surveyed 1,500 people affected by an eating disorder about their experiences of visiting their GP. The vast majority encountered uninformed GPs and a widespread lack of understanding. Rather than ‘choice’, their recovery was entirely down to chance – with the odds stacked against them.

## Chance: the ‘information lottery’

**59% of people visit their GP about their eating disorder worries**

**beat** always encourages people to speak to their GP about their eating disorder. Speaking out ends the silence and secrecy on which eating disorders thrive. It is a courageous step – and a great first move towards recovery.

**“My GP referred me straight away to the nearest mental health unit. The help I got was immeasurable. Not once did I feel a burden or that I wasn’t worth bothering about. I’m lucky to live near one of the best GPs.”**

But people need to have confidence and trust that their GP is informed about eating disorders and knows how to help them. **beat** knows that an understanding and supportive GP can be a gateway to effective treatment – and a signpost to recovery.

## Yet according to our survey:

**only 15% of people felt their GP understood eating disorders and knew how to help**



**“I felt as if my weight had to drop before the GP would take my worries seriously.”**

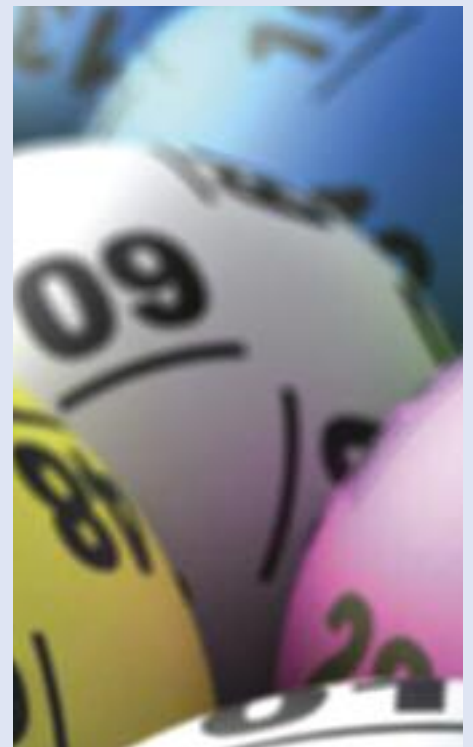
**“When I first went to see my GP they didn’t listen at all. They just told me it was a phase I was going through.”**

Far too many people encounter a GP who is not up to date about eating disorders. We have heard from people whose GPs did not take eating disorders seriously, treating it as a phase or a diet gone wrong. GPs should be putting an end to these dangerous myths – not propagating them.

The majority of people told us their GP was unable to help them – GPs didn’t know about available treatment or how they could access it. People affected by eating disorders need support – provided without delay. If GPs aren’t informed about available treatment then their patients’ recovery can be endangered – with fatal consequences.

**“I left the doctors feeling disheartened, patronised and as if I was making a big fuss about nothing.”**

**beat** is committed to bring about change, and improving the choices that everyone has about their health. The NHS has promised a service based on choice – not on chance. Our major campaigning issue for 2009 is to hold the NHS to their promise.



“You have the right to choice about your NHS care and to information to support these choices.”

**The NHS Constitution**



“People with eating disorders should be assessed and receive treatment at the earliest opportunity.”

**The NICE guidelines on eating disorders**

## Ending the lottery: a campaign for choice

The NICE guidelines on eating disorders provide evidence-based recommendations of effective treatment. They state that recovery is possible, provided that GPs listen to their patients, act quickly and, in the case of young people, involve their families as much as possible.

The NHS Constitution grants patients a legal right to the treatment NICE recommends. GPs are crucial to this right becoming a reality. Our campaign will hold the health service to account. We will champion best practice and highlight where changes are needed. We call on the NHS to do away with the unacceptable variety in standards of primary care.

That only 15% of our survey felt their GPs to be informed and understanding is a shocking indictment of just how much needs to be done.



## Choosing recovery

**“My GP phoned me the next morning and told me he’d referred me to a specialist eating disorder service.”**

**“I was happy to open up to my GP. She made it feel as if I could – because she was there to help me.”**

**beat** wants to see the NHS deliver their promise. We want anyone affected by an eating disorder to feel able to speak to their GP, confident they will reach someone who understands their condition and is willing to listen.

Right now, too few people receive the quality of service that should be theirs by right – rather than by luck or chance. It is only by ending this information lottery that everyone will have the best chance of beating their eating disorder.

**“My GP discussed the different options for treatment – she told me about counselling and other services I could be referred to. She explained how long the referral would take. I left feeling relieved and comfortable – and optimistic about recovery.”**

