



Mental health problems in young people are thought to account for approximately 50% of the disease burden among 12-25 year olds. It is widely recognised that most chronic and severe mental health problems begin in adolescence, with about 75% of all mental illnesses emerging between the ages of 15 and 25. In about 3-5% of these young people, mental illness persists, becoming a chronic problem. Why is this? There is evidence that young people with mental health issues are not accessing mental health services, possibly due to the fragmentation of mental health services, and overall poor provision of mental health services for young people. This has resulted in a lack of quality care for adolescents and young adults with mental health disorders. This briefing describes a CLAHRC Fellowship project that aimed to improve youth mental health services in one area of the East of England.

The policy context

*No Health Without Mental Health*¹ published in 2011 by the Department of Health, outlines the Coalition Government's strategy for mental health. It recognises the need to promote mental health across all ages, and the importance of intervening in the crucial childhood and teenage years in order to help prevent mental illness from developing, and to mitigate its effects when it does. However, a report published in 2012 by the Mental Health Foundation², suggested that *No Health Without Mental Health* has had limited impact on service commissioning and provision.

The research

The aim of the project was to implement an evidence-based service redesign of the Youth Mental Health Service (YMHS) for Norfolk. The process was through a review of the current literature, then taken forward through an iterative consultative process with local stakeholders, patient groups, commissioners and senior management in the NHS Foundation Trust. Through this process, an evolving vision and proposed service model was developed which gained widespread agreement and common ownership.

Results

A systematic review of the literature, and an identification of relevant qualitative evidence, together with contributions from experts in the field of child and adolescent mental health and service redesign, proved to be the essential components of this project. As a result, a radical service redesign was achieved in a short space of time. The aim is for the newly designed service to augment the Trust's new Wellbeing Service, and proposes a staged intervention based on the needs of the individual. The stages comprise detection through active in-reach, with the Wellbeing Service as the first port of call for specialist interventions. The service will offer advice and specific interventions where appropriate, an intensive support team aiming to prevent hospital admission, and liaison with the acute service to minimise inpatient stay.

The new team will include staff from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and will focus on individuals with emerging, or potentially emerging, serious mental health problems. These would include young people with complex psychological difficulties, persistent mental health problems, 'at risk' mental states and young people with significant risk issues.

Impact

The youth service of the Norfolk Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, now has a clear vision, robust management support and an increasingly detailed implementation and financial plan. In time, the pathway for youth mental health should extend well beyond severe mental illness, and into school, colleges and youth groups, specifically targeting 'at risk' individuals through social services and youth offending teams. It is expected that further discussions will then enable all agencies to align their priorities and enhance cooperative working. This project will form part of a wider service redesign within the Trust, and has proved to be a catalyst in stimulating clinician-led projects in other clinical areas. It is hoped that the evaluation of this project will demonstrate improved access and benefits for patients.

Conclusions

This project brought about a radical service change in a short space of time. Despite initial scepticism and seemingly overwhelming complexity, it was possible to galvanise support for a fundamental service redesign for the benefit of young people with mental health issues.

References

1. *No health without mental health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages.* http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_123766
2. *The Mental Health Strategy, system reforms and spending pressures: what do we know so far?* Centre for Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, *Mind and Rethink Mental Illness* 2012.