

SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS: **PSSRU** THE BALANCE OF CARE IN CUMBRIA

Outline of a research and development project undertaken by the Personal Social Services Research Unit [PSSRU] and the North West Dementia Centre [NWDC]. This work has been commissioned by Eden Valley NHS Primary Care Trust working in partnership with Cumbria Social Services Department and North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Trust

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BACKGROUND Government policy is firmly committed to the principle of community care for older people with mental health problems. The primary assumption is that most, including those with complex needs, can, and would prefer to be, treated/supported in their own homes. Differences in service mix, resource levels and historical context have however led to variations in the ability of local providers to achieve this.

Through the setting of standards within the National Service Framework for Older People an attempt is now being made to address these inconsistencies and drive up the quality of care. This is the context within which this local service evaluation has been commissioned.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY The study is designed to inform local commissioners' decisions about the mix of services needed by older people with mental health problems thereby underpinning future strategic planning. It will build on previous work undertaken by the PSSRU concerned with estimating the balance of care.

DESIGN Drawing heavily on the collection of local data, the evaluation will be firmly grounded in the experience of clients, carers and practitioners/clinicians.

The study will be conducted over a twelve-month period, work being undertaken in four stages:

- In the first stage information about the current pattern of services and existing data from PSSRU/NWDC databases will be compared with national data.

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The **Personal Social Services Research Unit** undertakes social and health care research, focusing particularly on policy research and analysis of equity and efficiency in community care and long term care and related areas, including services for elderly people, people with mental health problems and children in care. The Unit's work is funded mainly by the Department of Health.

The PSSRU Bulletin and publication lists are available free of charge from the PSSRU librarian in Canterbury (01227 827773) and on the Internet the Unit Web site can be found at <http://www.pssru.ac.uk> The PSSRU was established at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1974 and from 1996 has operated from three sites:

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- The second stage will explore how services are presently allocated. This will involve the completion of a survey detailing the characteristics of a cohort of admissions to residential, nursing and mental health in-patient beds and a sample of clients receiving a community care package.
- In the third stage the study will examine the feasibility of changing the existing balance of services. Local practitioners, in consultation with clients and carers, will work with case vignettes developed from the above data to explore the possibility of providing creative community care packages to meet the needs of people currently likely to be admitted to institutional care. These will then be costed and, as far as possible, considered in accordance with local practice for the allocation of resources.
- The final stage will consider the implications of the decisions made above, exploring a number of possible service options in consultation with a range of local stakeholders. The findings will then be reported to the Modernisation Board and other relevant stakeholders in order to inform future service development.

OUTCOMES

This is one of the few pieces of work which takes an evidence-based, whole systems approach to explore the balance of services needed by older people with mental health problems. Firmly located within the context of the National Service Framework the findings will have a resonance for the provision of health and social services nationwide.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The PSSRU/NWDC staff conducting the study at the University of Manchester are Sue Tucker, Jane Hughes, David Challis and Alistair Burns of the Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust. For further information please contact Sue Tucker tel 0161 275 5938; email sue.tucker@man.ac.uk
