

Proposed Mental Health Service Cutbacks - A report of the carers consultation meeting, 26th April 2006.



'Services are clean water for families'

On 20th March 2006, Hertfordshire Primary Care Trusts began a public consultation process to seek opinion on proposed reductions to the services provided by Hertfordshire Partnership Trust (HPT) to people of all ages with mental health problems and to a lesser extent learning disabilities and alcohol misuse difficulties. The consultation is due to end on 3rd May 2006.

As part of the consultation and to ensure carers were given accurate information and the opportunity to contribute to the process, *Carers in Hertfordshire* sent details of the proposed cuts and consultation questionnaire to over 3000 mental health, learning disability, substance misuse, older adult and parent carers on its database. In addition, *Carers in Hertfordshire* organised a carers consultation meeting on 26th April at the Ramada Jarvis Hotel in Hatfield to provide carers with further information and an opportunity to discuss how the cutbacks could potentially impact on them and the people they care for.

Carers consultation meeting: 26 April 2006

Approximately 80 mental health, learning disability, substance misuse, older adult and parent carers from across the county attended the *Carers in Hertfordshire* event. Jess Lievesley, from Hertfordshire Joint Commissioning Team, gave a presentation on the proposed cutbacks. The presentation was followed by an opportunity for carers to ask questions or make comments to the speaker and other representatives of Hertfordshire NHS present namely:

- Pam Handley, Chair of Watford and Three Rivers Primary Care Trust;
- Keith Moulin, Older Adult Mental Health Lead for HPT
- Ann Webster, Assistant Director of Learning Disability Services for HPT.

A summary of the issues and comments raised by carers is included below. Written comments made by carers are attached to the report. Following the question session the speakers left the meeting and carers had the further opportunity to discuss their views on the cutbacks.

At the end of the meeting, a carer made the proposal:

--That a message should be sent from this meeting to the Primary Care Trusts that carers are not prepared to accept the proposed cut backs to mental health, learning disability and alcohol services---

A vote was taken on the motion, which was unanimously supported by all those present with no objections or abstentions.

Summary of issues, questions and comments raised by carers and responses from representatives of Hertfordshire NHS

Financial Status of Hertfordshire NHS

Q. *Only 7% of trusts are in debt across the country. Why is Hertfordshire NHS in debt?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- The accumulated debt goes back many years.
- There are too many general hospitals in Hertfordshire. Other parts of the country have a greater geographical spread between hospitals and money from the government is insufficient to fund all of the hospitals.
- The government has set targets that waiting lists should be reduced. As a result this has meant more resources are required. In addition consultants are now being paid more so they will increase the number of surgeries offered to patients to reduce waiting lists.
- All GP's have recently doubled their salary in Hertfordshire. The government gave the county 75% of the money to cover this increase but the remaining 25% has had to be found from other budgets.
- Less money is allocated by the government to southern counties for health costs as the general health of the population is deemed to be better than that of the north of the country.
- The government has been focused on meeting targets and improving standards of care. In past years across the whole NHS reaching targets has been a greater priority than getting the money right. The Primary Care Trusts in the country have been told that they must now pay off their debts and break even.

Q. *Have efforts been made by the Primary Care Trusts to identify cuts from other areas of the health service rather than front line mental health services?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- Management costs will be reduced with the 8 Primary Care Trusts in Hertfordshire coming 1 or 2 and the Strategic Health Authorities merging.
- The government have set 6 new priorities for the NHS to reach targets. None of the 6 priorities are related to mental health, learning disability or alcohol services.
- The government have stipulated that the NHS have to make 2.5% cuts on all services. It has been a locally made decision that in order to get financial balance in balance a further 2.5% cut, totalling 5%, will have to be made by HPT. General Hospital Trusts have to make a total of 7.5% to internal structure and services

- Savings have been made but they are not sufficient to mean that front line services will not be affected.
- Mental health services are required, like other parts of the NHS, to contribute to the repayment of the accumulated debts.

Q. *How much money is being paid to Primary Care Trust Chief Executives and Senior Managers as redundancy repayments and golden handshakes?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- All workers on permanent contracts will have the same redundancy package as any one else would.

It was acknowledged by some carers that mental health services have improved over recent years following an increase in spending. HPT has managed its finances over recent years and has not over spent or accumulated debts. Nevertheless, HPT are required by the Primary Care Trusts to assist in the repayment of debts accumulated by other parts of the health service in Hertfordshire. One carer commented:

'... Now we are faced with the prospect of going back to the dark ages and this is just not good enough. HPT has never been in the red... it is therefore unethical to take money from HPT. How can this be justified? How can this be sharing? Money should be taken from those areas that have overspent and HPT should be left alone... it is just not fair.'

Q. *The new six priorities for the NHS, that do not include mental health, learning disability or alcohol services, state that they should be addressing health inequality. Isn't it 'inequality' that they are taking money from HPT when they have provided a service for a number of years within its financial means and balanced its books but they are still being required to contribute to the debts accumulated by other parts of the NHS?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- The government does not consider inequality to relate to the stigma of mental health but rather relates it to deprivation and poverty.
- As mental health services have received additional money in recent years it is no longer a priority of the government so therefore it is not exempt from making contributions to reduce NHS debt.

One carer commented:

'... it has readily been accepted that health inequalities exist for people with a learning disability in that individuals are not getting the same service as other people in society and that they are actually dying prematurely. I am therefore appalled that they are not considered a priority.'

St Julian's Ward closure

Q. *As the locked mental health ward at St Julian's is moving to Harperbury Hospital, why can't the acute ward also move there? What will happen to those patients who would normally be admitted to St Julian's ward in times of crisis and relapse of mental ill health?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- It is a possibility that long term Harperbury Hospital could be a site for an acute inpatient ward. However in order to achieve this, a new building would have to be erected and therefore more money would be required. The proposed cutbacks are to reduce inpatient beds and spending more money on services is not part of the proposal or consultation.
- Community services have been developed in order to attempt to reduce the need for hospital admission and Shrodells will provide hospital beds when they are needed.
- If a person has become acutely mentally unwell and is deemed to need admission into hospital a bed will be found for them.

One carer stated:

'...now St Julian's is closing can you tell me what I am supposed to do with my wife when she is ill with her depression because there is not enough room at Albany Lodge or Shrodells. So why close the ward?'

Reduction to day services

Q. *Currently older people with mental health problems have to wait a long time for a place to become available to them at a day centre. As it is proposed that day service provision will be reduced further, is it hoped that older people with mental health problems will die before they need a service?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- HPT are working closely with Adult Care Services on how other resources can be used more efficiently and provided as an alternative to those that may be affected by cuts.
- Some current services such as those providing respite have spare capacity so could be utilised to offer alternative care.
- However cuts will potentially mean that some people who currently receive a service with maybe less need will no longer be offered a service.

Closure of Lister Hospital's acute day treatment unit

Q. *This service is being used by people with mental health and alcohol problems - why is it proposed that this service is cut?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- The service has been in place for a short time but has not delivered outcomes as expected.
- The unit has not been able to provide sufficient support to people in crisis to enable them to stay out of hospital.
- The cutbacks proposed are deemed to effect areas of the HPT service that will 'cause least impact'.

Staff reductions

Q. *If money is to be saved on staffing within HPT why are agency workers being used?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- The number of agency staff is reducing and instead permanent staff are being employed.

Older people's mental health services: closure of Seward Lodge Day Care Unit

Q. *Why is it proposed that Seward Lodge is closed?*

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- The consultation refers to the closure of the day centre and not the respite or in-patient service of Seward Lodge.
- Currently there is insufficient money to develop services adequately for older adults with mental health problems across the county.
- In the past some older adults with mental health problems have been placed out of the county for specialist treatment. It is planned that in order to save money these people are to be brought back to Hertfordshire so they can receive treatment more locally. The savings made will enable reinvestment in more services for older adults with mental health problems.
- It is hoped that this money can be used to develop more services for older adults who have a diagnosis of dementia, depression and other mental illnesses such as schizophrenia as well as younger adults with dementia.

One carer stated that because they did a 'good job' and did not 'bother' mental health workers, the person that they were supporting was discharged despite suffering from dementia a mental illness that would realistically not get better in the future but instead worse.

'...when I asked the CPN who told me my wife would no longer receive a service from Seward Lodge, what do I do when I am going up the wall? The answer they gave me was to go to my doctor... when I spoke to the doctor he said that my wife would have to be referred again! What do I do?'

Another carer stated that they did not agree with the proposals:

'...we know cuts need to be made but they are not of our making... there must be no cuts to mental health... these are our most vulnerable people... Investing in Your Mental Health encouraged service users to expect better services not cutbacks... it is going to cause great unhappiness and the problems will cost more in the future because anything you cut back now... you will get problems later down the line – it is a waste!... as carers we have a terrible time... you can't get respite on the day you need it... it is impossible trying to go to work... we won't even get a pension at the end of all of this... so no cuts to mental health – take the cuts from other areas.'

Learning Disability: therapy staff

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- HPT's learning disability service has been asked to make £310,000 savings.
- It is proposed that this will be done by reducing the specialist physiotherapy and dietetics service available to people with learning disabilities. Instead it would be planned that individuals would be enabled to access mainstream services.

The potential impact of the cuts on service users and carers

Q. What kind of assessment will be made of individuals affected by cuts?

A. Hertfordshire NHS response:

- Service users will be entitled to a review of their care plan.
- Some people following this review will no longer be offered a service as the threshold for care services will alter.
- Those with severe and enduring mental illness will not be denied a service from HPT.

One carer commented:

'...we are talking about the most vulnerable people in our society... we are also taking about some of us having a life long prison sentence of caring for these people... I would at times rather have gone to prison than care for my son... not the care I have to give him but the way I have had to battle to get services..'

Summary Conclusion

'...these cuts are nothing short of disastrous.'

Carers do not accept the proposals to reduce services to people with mental health problems, learning disability and alcohol misuse difficulties in Hertfordshire. They do not believe the proposals have accurately assessed and evaluated the impact that the cuts will have on service users and carers. It is considered by carers to be unfair and unjust that HPT, which has balanced its books in recent years, should be made to contribute to the repayment of debts accumulated by the Primary Care Trusts and other parts of Hertfordshire NHS. Carers consider that for too long the NHS has provided inadequate levels of funding for mental health, which are regarded as the Cinderella service. In consequence, carers believe that service users have been provided with inferior services. In recent years, there have been signs of improvement in services. The proposed cutbacks would cause irrevocable damage to mental health services in Hertfordshire and are therefore unacceptable and unworkable.

'I am a single parent with a child who has ADHD and Aspergers syndrome... this is the equivalent of loosing a child. I have decided to send him to another continent out of Britain so he can receive the support he needs and to protect my own health... my health is at risk...as a carer it is a life sentence supporting a person with an illness or disability – you lose your job, one that you love, and the family crashes. Now there are these cuts – families will suffer... how can I be consulted on cuts to services? How can I be put into the position that I must lose my child in order to make sure he receives the support he needs and I take care of myself? I think the cuts should not happen. We don't care how they make cuts but it should not affect mental health services. Mainstream education or other health services are not cut. You can't cut clean water and these services are clean water for families – you should not touch them.'

Sue Reeve
Chief Executive

Helen Ward
**Mental Health & Learning Disability Carers
Manager**