

Guideline Ten

A strategy to promote a positive image of people with psychosis needs to be developed locally

Background

Psychosis is a highly stigmatising illness. Attitudes among the general public to people with psychosis are almost wholly negative. Whenever people with psychosis are portrayed in the media, it is usually in a pejorative and unhelpful way. Those working in the health service have a responsibility to accurately inform both the public and primary health care workers about the nature and reality of psychosis.

Requirements

1. A local community education programme. This should emphasise the treatability of psychosis and counteract negative social attitudes regarding psychosis. This should be targeted at professional and voluntary sectors likely to encounter young people with psychosis; For example student health services, schools, police, homeless agencies, and religious or cultural organisations.
2. Local media support. An attempt should be made to form positive relationships with journalists from local newspapers, radio and television, in order to correct mistaken beliefs about psychosis. This might include local success stories both of individuals and services.

Getting it right....

Kate had been working within the telephone sales section of a Local firm before she became unwell. Her Community Psychiatric Nurse and doctor liaised with the staff health department of the firm to discuss the impact of Kate's psychosis and how she might best be supported by her employer and to allay their concerns about her ability to cope with the

demands of the post. Kate successfully returned to her former position and continues to be supported by her employer receiving assistance with her medication regime and given time off work to attend hospital appointments.

Where things can go wrong....

Tony returned to work following his psychosis and experienced considerable stress related to the insensitivity of his work colleagues who teased and taunted him describing him as 'mad' and 'loony' and who made constant references to his time in the local 'bins Tony's confidence was quickly undermined and he found himself becoming quiet and withdrawn and getting increasingly anxious about the thought of going to work and having to face his colleagues. He started having time off work and was eventually forced to give up his job. He remains unemployed and is fearful of returning to a work situation where he may be exposed to similar teasing and intimidation again.

Ask Yourself.....

- Is there anyone in your local area community who may possibly by virtue or personal and family experience have a sympathetic and realistic view of psychosis?
- Do all the voluntary agencies that work in local health provision (i.e. the District General Hospital), have input to mental health?

National Service Framework Links: Standard 1 requires that services should promote mental health for all, working with individuals and communities to cease discrimination against people with mental health problems.