

mentalhealth

March 2009

Today



Welsh lessons

A suicide prevention strategy
in the wake of Bridgend

in this month's issue: NHS needs to tackle stigma
Veterans' art What is a public place? Star wards

March 2009

contents

5 EDITORIAL

6 NEWS

Government announces its dementia strategy
NICE advises on personality disorder treatments

9 IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Steve Shrubbs, director of the NHS confederation's mental health network, on stigma

FEATURES

10 COVER STORY

Welsh lessons

Adam James looks at Wales' suicide strategy

12 Visible support

People with mental health problems need more than medication says Susanah Strong

14 Unlocking the door on Broadmoor

Wendy Moore examines the truth behind the myths

16 Northern exposure

Jackie Cosh reports on Scotland's community treatment orders

FRONTLINE

19 Outside the box

Alison Faulkner wants a debate on acute care standards

20 Welfare writes

Judy Stenger looks at the employment support allowance

21 The bigger picture

Patsy Staddon on alcohol misuse

REPORT

22 Chiara Samele and colleagues look at an offending behaviour programme for mentally ill prisoners

28 ARTISTIC LICENCE

Battle lines

An exhibition from war veterans

30 LEGAL EYE

David Hewitt looks at what constitutes a public place

DIGEST

31 Network

Tina Coldham, chair of the National Survivor User Network, draws strength from others

32 Resources

What's new for professional development

34 Hello!?

Paul Gascoigne's wife and family on life with an alcoholic



It's time to REALLY talk, says the Star wards team



EDITOR Lynn Eaton

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD Andy Bell *Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health*; Fran Gorman *Mental Health Foundation*; Raza Griffiths *Social Perspectives Network*; Clare Monger *Together: Working for Wellbeing*; Niall Smith, *NHS Confederation*; Kate Stringer *Time to Change*; Susannah Strong *freelance journalist*; Vicky Trimikliniotis *Rethink*

ADVERTISING Helen Charlton 01273 666734

SUBSCRIPTIONS Customer Services, OLM-Pavilion, Richmond House, Richmond Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 3RL, 01273 623222

DESIGN Katherine Jones, OLM-Pavilion

PRINT Newnorth, Bedford

© OLM-Pavilion

ISSN 1474-5186

Welsh lessons

A spate of apparent suicides in south Wales, which came to light in January last year, has thrown the spotlight on suicide prevention strategies there

Adam James reports on the comprehensive response from public services

Suicide is rare. In the UK one-hundredth of one per cent of people kill themselves. That's about 11 in every 100,000 people. But suicide leaves deep and long-lasting ripples of misery in families and communities.

In response, England and Scotland have launched suicide prevention strategies. In November, the Welsh Assembly followed suit, launching its own draft five-year action plan to reduce suicides and self-harm.

Wales's chief medical officer, Dr Tony Jowell, has admitted the plan's launch was brought forward following alarm at the cluster of suicides by young people in the borough of Bridgend, south Wales.

Since January 2007, 24 people aged 15–27 in or from Bridgend are believed to have killed themselves. Rob Scott Jones, aged 17, was the latest. He was found hanged on 28 December last year in Newbridge Fields. However, the draft plan (consultation ended in January) covers the whole of Wales, ministers stress.

Based largely on Scotland's Choose Life campaign, the plan takes a comprehensive, societal approach to suicide prevention and self-harm among people of all ages. The plan, which targets all vulnerable higher-risk groups, from the homeless to troubled teenagers, is guided by six 'principles of effective action'. These include:

- reducing taboo around suicide
- tackling social exclusion
- ensuring frontline services respond to suicidal people
- promoting research into suicide and self-harm prevention
- changing professionals' awareness and attitudes through training.

Health boards, schools, local authorities, NHS trusts, police, young people's groups, prisons and even libraries are being entrusted to administer the plan. The All-Wales Mental Health Promotion Network will

co-ordinate these organisations and stage an annual suicide prevention summit.

Network head Phil Chick emphasises that the plan has more of a public health and community focus than a mental health one. And he hopes it will strengthen individual and community 'resilience' to misfortune, poverty and trauma.

'You can't always eradicate risk factors [for suicide],' says Mr Chick. 'But there is a higher risk of suicide among young people who have experienced a relationship breakdown, for example. So, via a school and its counselling, you can help people develop resilience.'

As for the plan's specifics, Mind Cymru will be responsible for rolling out Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). This will involve running two-day workshops for 13,000 frontline professionals in Wales – such as teachers, social workers, ambulance and emergency workers, and coast guards – within the next two years. The aim is to equip professionals with the skills and sensitivity to pick up on and help people with suicidal thoughts.

'ASIST is about helping professionals make a meaningful contribution to [someone] staying safe,' explains Alan Briscoe, Mind Cymru's assistant project manager for ASIST.

'People might not have a mental health problem, as such. But they might be overwhelmed by things going on in their lives. For example, someone might walk into a housing office and it might become apparent that they are in distress. If a housing worker can ask the right questions, this person may disclose that they are thinking of suicide. This professional can then connect that person with support – whether it be a mental health professional or not.'

Mind will also deliver mental health first-aid courses to community leaders in Wales, who will in turn disseminate this information. Other plan initiatives include a 24-hour telephone helpline for Wales, an extension of counselling for pupils, helping employers spot suicidal staff and providing mental health advisers to youth offending teams.

The assembly aims to reduce suicides in Wales by 10% by 2013. However, there are 300 suicides a year in Wales. Can the action plan reach its target? Mr Briscoe is sceptical, saying the target is 'at the mercy' of other factors.

'At the moment we are heading into a strong economic downturn. This could play havoc with figures like this,' he says. 'Plus, I would be very concerned if we focus too heavily on reducing headline suicide rates. The plan contains a good set of measures.'

Privately, the old chestnut of funding is also a concern to some organisations that provided input into the plan and particularly the issue of whether initiatives have been fully costed. The assembly, however, says extra funding will be provided, and £15 million of Big Lottery funds could also be used.

These concerns aside, you will be hard pressed to find a squeak of dissent against the plan. 'We absolutely welcome it and support it,' says Paul Stockton, Samaritans' regional representative for Wales. 'It's most welcome,' echoes Anne Parry of Papyrus, a UK suicide prevention charity aimed at young people.

With a recession biting, Mr Chick adds: 'Arguably, there is no better time for an action plan.' ■

Suicide in Wales

- Wales's suicide rate is higher than England's, but lower than Scotland's.
- Around 20 in 100,000 men die by suicide. For women it is five in 100,000.
- Suicide accounts for one in five deaths among men aged 15–24 and one in 10 deaths in women aged 15–25.
- 6,000 Welsh residents (out of 2.9 million) are admitted to hospital each year for self-harm.

Photograph by Barry Batchelor, PA Photos



Bridgend tragedies

A South Wales Police review of apparent suicides in Bridgend found no evidence of criminality, suicide pacts or an incitement to suicide.

A spokesperson told *Mental Health Today*: 'There are clearly similarities between recent sudden deaths in Bridgend, but South Wales Police can confirm that its investigations have by no means uncovered any criminal evidence that links them.'

Research suggests that media reports of suicides can lead to copycat suicides. Last year Vincent and Sharon Pritchard, whose son Nathaniel, 15, was found hanged in Bridgend, said media reports glamourised ways of taking one's life to young people. Local MP Madeleine Moon said the media were 'part of the problem'.

But Welsh health minister Edwina Hart noted that Welsh media outlets had taken a 'responsible approach' to the apparent suicides.

Papyrus is concerned that online memorial sites to suicide victims also glamourise suicide. In September last year the UK government launched the Council for Child Internet Safety to recommend ways that the internet can be made safer for young people.