

Public Mental Health: Pushing the boundaries

In recent times, the focus of public mental health has moved from a primary focus on preventing psychiatric disorders through early identification of symptoms and treatment of mental illness through psychiatric services to a greater understanding of the broader bio/psycho/social causes of poor mental health, including diagnosed psychiatric conditions. In the area usually identified as common mental disorders (often referred to as 'CMD' - for example depression, anxiety, phobias); there has been significant progress in developing community level responses that address environmental factors rather than focussing on treating individuals with a diagnosis.

This shift of thinking and practice has not, however, been apparent for areas typically described as severe and enduring mental illness (often abbreviated to 'SME'), this would include diagnoses such as bipolar disorder (previously manic depression), schizophrenia, personality disorder or even eating disorders, and may also include "symptoms" associated with diagnoses like paranoia, self-harm or hearing voices.

Values-based practice is at the core of this programme. It brings together a strong partnership of philosophers, practitioners and activists with a shared ambition to shift thinking away from the idea of individual illness towards an approach which takes into account the broader context of public mental health; recognising the importance of communities, relationships and the impact of inequalities and power relationships. The ultimate goal will be to establish mechanisms for shared decision-making to take place at all levels from community development to individual care planning.

The programme is a collaboration between Manchester Metropolitan University, the Collaborating Centre for Values-Based Practice in Health and Social Care - St Catherine's College Oxford and the Mental Health Foundation and is led by Anna Bergqvist and David Crepaz-Keay.

Seminar series

This programme includes a four-year seminar series that will explore and develop the growing interest and emerging evidence that a broader bio/psycho/social approach may yield benefits in SME and identify ways to move this potential towards public mental health as an evidence-based intervention for SME.

Some seminars will address broad public mental health factors such as inequalities (which may be caused by, for example, race, gender, geography or genetics); some will address the key skills required to affect change and others will focus on existing diagnoses and identify how a public mental health approach might be developed and tested.

Seminar 1: Understanding personality disorders as expertise in research

The first seminar will take place on 10 February, it will be online, hosted by the Collaborating Centre for Values-Based Practice in Health and Social Care – St Catherine’s College Oxford. This seminar will centre on the diagnosis of personality disorder. There are two factors that make this an interesting starting point for pushing boundaries in public mental health:

1. It’s a tricky one! - It raises a number of fundamental questions on the nature of self, identity, the relationships between people and themselves and each other.
2. There is little consensus or orthodoxy. - We can focus our efforts on developing a constructive new approach rather than dismantling rigid but flawed established traditions.

To register for the first seminar please visit:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_PjMJLLBnT9uKe6zPxYhtfw

Funded Doctoral Student

This programme will be supported by a collaborative interdisciplinary doctoral award which will investigate and understand the role of patients as experts in the emerging discipline of public mental health and associated models of person-centered management that is geared towards the restoration of well-being and re-engagement in major social, vocational and family roles.

Complementing the recent focus on biomarkers and predictive genetic screening in psychiatric medicine, this project will address the gap in our theoretical understanding of the concepts of quality of life and shared decision-making in the philosophy of psychiatry and psychopathology and in the appreciation of patients’ contribution to the development of a new public mental health approach to severe and enduring mental illness (SMI).

The student will be based at Manchester Metropolitan University and co-hosted by the Mental Health Foundation.

If you would like more details of the programme or the doctoral student opportunity please contact: Anna Bergqvist at a.bergqvist@mmu.ac.uk or David Crepaz-Keay at dcrepaz-keay@mentalhealth.org.uk