Transforming Tier 4 CAMHS and reducing out-of-area bed use

South London Mental Health and Community Partnership

What was the aim?

About 65% of south London children and young people needing inpatient beds were cared for outside South London Partnership's (SLP) area during 2016/17, on average 73 miles from home. Growing demand on services included escalations from Tier 3 to Tier 4 child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and increased admissions.

SLP's three trusts – Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust – needed to make changes so more children and young people were cared for closer to home, with fewer out-of-area placements. SLP wanted to reduce inpatient demand so fewer young people needed to be admitted to accident and emergency (A&E), acute and mental health wards.

What was the solution?

SLP realised it needed to enhance CAMHS Tier 4 services and better manage existing bed capacity. It set up a programme led by clinicians and operational managers, which identified as key projects:

- a joint bed management service with a centralised 'hub' for referrals and common pathways and criteria to manage admissions into south London CAMHS beds

- new and expanded crisis care teams run by each trust and working across the 12 south London boroughs and local A&E departments

- increased local capacity for young people's psychiatric intensive care so they could be assessed, cared for and recover in a location easier for their families to visit

- an improved dialectic behaviour therapy pathway across south London including a new service at Oxleas, working with young people and their families to provide holistic, intensive psychiatric interventions

- an expanded adolescent outreach team at South West London and St George's

- a crisis line service, including a pilot of a new telephone line

- enhanced eating disorders services across the area.

The new care models programme of devolved commissioning encouraged SLP to take an 'invest to save' approach. SLP had already committed £3.5 million for expanded and new Tier 4 CAMHS from September 2018.

What were the challenges?

Partnership working means understanding the influences and issues other trusts and colleagues face. This includes their processes, pathways, external factors such as population, and culture.

There is much groundwork to do in discussing, developing and agreeing common pathways and protocols.

What were the results?

- SLP introduced joint bed management and closer cross-trust clinical working from August 2017 – a major factor in reducing the proportion of young people cared for in specialist mental health beds outside the area by 75% by the end of July 2018.

- The average distance from south London for out-of-area placements has been reduced to 44 miles.

- The new eight-bed adolescent psychiatric intensive care unit is already bringing more capacity for local patients in south London.

What were the learning points?

Some services, such as crisis care, required tailored approaches to reach the same goal. The differing population demographics, the wider health system such as acute trusts, and existing relationships, mean one size does not fit all.

It was important from the outset to involve clinicians – for example, as clinical leads for projects – from all the trusts. SLP also involved young people themselves – including recent users of its urgent care services – in designing new services.

Recruitment is a common problem for mental health trusts. SLP aimed to fill new, challenging roles with outstanding people, and help existing services where people moved across. The trusts joined together for the first, successful SLP joint recruitment campaign, specifically for CAMHS roles.

Next steps

Introducing new services that will help reduce admissions and provide urgent, local, community-based care and support more rapidly.

Clinicians continue to work together to forge new approaches and spread best practice. Many other areas within CAMHS remain where SLP can innovate and ensure equality of access. The shared purpose among SLP's trusts underpins sustainability.

Want to know more?

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