CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS? GP PRACTICES AND YOUNG PEOPLE MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN TOGETHER

Aims 75% of adult mental health problems appear in adolescence, but young people report difficulties accessing appropriate health services. GP practices are not always seen as responsive, and barriers to access are reported by young people. Greater understanding is required of the benefits, pitfalls and possibilities of young people’s engagement in general practice. This study examines the effects of a collaborative, peer-led intervention to improve primary health care for young people with mental health concerns.

Methods Focus group discussions were held with young people trained as Changemakers, to explore the reported benefits and risks of volunteering. 1:1 interviews were conducted with representatives from partner organisations, GPs and practice managers to explore what difference, if any, young people’s input had made, for whom, and how.

Results Our findings demonstrate the potential of the programme, including Welcome, to drive positive changes in general practice, led by young people, supported by voluntary sector partners. We outline the challenges and opportunities of the Changemakers model and the factors influencing its success, including the support and guidance required. We report young people’s suggestions for new ways of working, their ideas for engaging young people, and recommendations for health service delivery.

Conclusions Traditional models of patient involvement do not work with young people. This peer-led intervention offers a promising alternative, stimulating practical and attitudinal changes in the delivery of young people-friendly primary care. It requires whole practice investment of time and resources, and a willingness to embrace change. The resulting efforts to encourage access by young people, including those with mental health problems, will potentially benefit the wider population.

LOCATION OF CARE FOR TEENAGERS IN HOSPITAL: A STAFF PERSPECTIVE

Aims Deciding whether a young person should be admitted to a paediatric or adult ward is not always an easy judgement. In a district general hospital with a fairly flexible admission policy, which includes living an ‘adult lifestyle’ as suggesting admission to an adult ward, we sought the views of both referring and receiving staff. This was part of a wider project aimed at encouraging patient choice when determining location of care.

Methods Two questionnaires were distributed, using an anonymous online survey tool, to:
1. Referring staff in primary care and the emergency department (38 responses)
2. Receiving staff working on the paediatric ward and adult admissions wards (71 responses)

Results Both referring and receiving staff were unclear about current admission guidance.

Referring staff reported the most important factors in choice of ward were age, emotional maturity, safety of other patients and whether the patient was already known to a consultant. Least important were staffing levels and bed availability. Similar opinions were expressed by receiving staff, although not surprisingly they placed more importance on adequate staffing levels.

94% of referrers reported that patient choice was fairly/very important, but only 55% regularly sought the young person’s preference.
Many receiving staff members were able to describe occasions in which they felt the ward choice was inappropriate for a young person, including when the decision went directly against patient choice.

When asked what factors defined an ‘adult lifestyle’, both groups expressed similar views, with employment, independent living and being parents themselves comprising the top three responses.

Receiving staff generally reported feeling confident when looking after young people, but few had received any specific training in the last 5 years. They knew how to seek sexual health advice. Worryingly, some nurses knew where to obtain general health advice, but only 69% of young people were mostly helpful (including about healthy lifestyles, smoking and sex and relationships, with a number of young people wishing for more advice in these areas.

In terms of independent health-seeking skills, 82% reported knowing where to obtain general health advice, but only 69% knew how to seek sexual health advice. Worryingly, some nurses felt that this question was not relevant to all their young people.

Conclusions This research suggests that overall our young people feel well prepared for becoming independent adults. However, not surprisingly, some anxiety still remains. Despite 92% reporting having enough information to help plan their futures, over a quarter felt they would benefit from additional guidance. As well as offering individualised support, it is important that general ‘life skills’ education is delivered effectively. Further consultation is required to determine whether schools, carers or professionals are best placed to facilitate this.

Paediatricians with Expertise in Cardiology

A REVIEW OF THE AVAILABILITY OF PEC (PAEDIATRICIAN WITH EXPERTISE IN CARDIOLOGY) SERVICES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Aims Smooth and successful transition to adult life is an important focus in care planning for young people who are Looked After. As surrogate parents, local authorities should ensure young people are appropriately prepared and supported throughout this challenging phase. This research sought to gain young people’s perspectives on whether this is currently being achieved in our area.

Methods A survey of Looked After young people aged 12–15 years was carried out in 2013, covering various aspects of preparedness for transition and thoughts about the future. Questionnaires were completed by young people either alone or with support from their school nurse. Out of 84 young people eligible, opportunistic sampling resulted in 38 responses.

Results 79% reported feeling positive about their futures. Many described specific aspects they were looking forward to, often relating to employment and independent living; while 5% found the prospect of future independence worrying. Many had high aspirations, with nearly half hoping to go to university. Being healthy, earning plenty of money and having children were also popular ambitions.

General ‘life skills’ education in schools was reported to be mostly helpful (including about healthy lifestyles, smoking and staying safe), with additional advice often obtained from adults outside school. However, information on some topics was viewed less positively, for example around money management and sex and relationships, with a number of young people wishing for more advice in these areas.

In terms of independent health-seeking skills, 82% reported knowing where to obtain general health advice, but only 69% knew how to seek sexual health advice. Worryingly, some nurses felt that this question was not relevant to all their young people.

Conclusions This research suggests that overall our young people feel well prepared for becoming independent adults. However, not surprisingly, some anxiety still remains. Despite 92% reporting having enough information to help plan their futures, over a quarter felt they would benefit from additional guidance. As well as offering individualised support, it is important that general ‘life skills’ education is delivered effectively. Further consultation is required to determine whether schools, carers or professionals are best placed to facilitate this.