

Whole Service Evaluation of Mental Health Services West Cork Mental Health Services 2011

In 2011, the Inspector of Mental Health services decided to examine a sample of whole sector mental health services, with the aim of evaluating the integration of care pathways and the range of services provided across the sector. West Cork was one of the three whole service evaluations carried out over three days from the 30 May to 1 June 2011.

The West Cork Mental Health Services (WCMHS) served a low density rural population of 55,000 and covered a wide geographical spread. The population density was 20 persons per square kilometre, with many people living in relatively isolated outreaches. The WCMHS had three sector teams that provided care and treatment across inpatient care, outpatient clinics, community-based services, residential and hostel-support services. There were no specialist adult teams. Despite its peripheral location geographically, the service had developed apace with best-practice and a person-centred modern mental health service. The WCMHS had received a Genio grant of €100,000 to consolidate and build on its Recovery based ethos. A Recovery orientation was very evident throughout the sector mental health services and espoused by all staff who met with the inspection team. The WCMHS was voted the 'most improved service' over the past three years in a survey carried out by National Service User Executive (NSUE).

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service was provided on behalf of the Health Service Executive by the Brothers of Charity.

How the Service was Delivered

- In-patient care was provided in the Centre for Mental Health Care and Recovery, an 18-bed approved centre located at Bantry General Hospital campus.
- Outpatient services, including clinics and talking therapies were provided in Bantry, Clonakilty, Skibbereen and Castletownbere.
- There were two resource centres, "Droumleigh" in Bantry and "St. David's" in Clonakilty which provided group programmes also.
- Residential accommodation was provided in a high support hostel "Perrot House", Skibbereen, in a recovery and rehabilitation hostel "Saol Nua" in Skibbereen, in 4 community bungalows "Baltimore Road", Skibbereen and in a high support hostel "Ard Realt", Bantry. A respite bed was available in each facility.
- Community based care was provided by community mental health nurses, by the Home Focus team and there was a Primary Care Liaison nurse.

The Centre for Mental Health Care and Recovery, Saol Nua, Ard Realt, Droumleigh, the Home Focus Team, and the Primary Care Liaison service were the focus of the inspection visit. Each is outlined in the reports below.

Discussion

A key feature of the WCMHS was the level of service user and carer input across all levels of the service, ranging from community voluntary initiatives, to governance committees, to training and education, to the Local Implementation Group. This, combined with a strong local leadership in all key disciplines, contributed towards a flexible, person-centred and integrated service. The WCMHS had made access to care by service users a priority. A team coordinator had been appointed and was pivotal in liaising with Primary Care, especially general practitioners (GPs), with community teams, and with the approved centre. All referrals were triaged at a team meeting and allocated to the most appropriate team member. This liaison has made for clear discharge planning, and more effective communication between mental health and Primary Care and a more efficient service for users. Urgent referrals were dealt with on the same day, waiting times for non-urgent appointments with a consultant had been reduced to two-three weeks and there was good access to talking therapies. The approved centre had introduced a telephone “listening service” on a 24-hour basis whereby service users, carers and other could telephone for information and advice at any time.

Whilst the core business of the WCMHS was mental illness, the mental health service was well embedded in the life of the community, including, in-reach to schools, participation in community social events, a West Cork Mental Health Forum comprising health service and community stakeholders. This integration supported access to care, recovery pathways and the de-stigmatisation of mental health services in West Cork.