

**in this month's issue:** The mental health of homeless young people  
Tackling physical health inequalities Soaps go mum and dad

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## Features

### **Death by discrimination ?** ([click here to view this article](#))

People with severe, long-term mental illness are 60% more likely to have heart disease, 80% more at risk of stroke, and 90% more likely to get bowel cancer. And if they do, they are more likely than other people to die, and to die sooner. These are some of the shocking findings reported by the Disability Rights Commission in its new report *Equal Treatment: Closing the Gap*. The report details the inequalities in access to primary health care services suffered by people with severe mental illness, the barriers they face in terms of staff attitudes, and the neglect of their physical health needs. The DRC wants more nurses employed in primary care to deliver health checks and health promotion. But others say mental health nurses must accept they have a responsibility for their clients' physical as well as mental health.

### **Truly, madly, weekly**

With *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* both shortlisted in this year's Mental Health Media Awards, it seems as though the soaps have finally cleaned up their act. After years of stereotyping and stigmatising portrayals of madness, the soaps seem at last to be producing rounded and realistic portrayals of mental illness and its impact on individuals and those around them. Says MHM Awards judge Donna Franceschild: 'They have finally discovered that by dealing with mental health problems in a realistic way they are actually hanging on to their audience.'

### **Testing times**

GPs will be soon be able to diagnose schizophrenia using simple skin patch, blood and breath tests, says the Ness Foundation, a Highlands-based research charity specialising in neurological conditions. The Ness Foundation says the tests will mean people get the treatment they need earlier, and that the treatments can be tailored better to people's individual needs. But critics say the stakes are too high if they are wrong, and that people who have been tested could find themselves unable to get life insurance or a mortgage, and may find it counts against them when trying to get a job. 'We would advise people to consider these issues very carefully before going ahead,' Sandra McDougall, legal officer at SAMH, says.

### **Home from home**

A new housing scheme for the elderly in Cumbria shows it is possible for older people with advanced dementia to continue to live independently in the community. Duddon Mews, one of the winners of the 2005 NIMHE Positive Practice Awards, is the result of an ambitious five-way partnership between the local mental health and social services, a housing association, Age Concern and an independent sector home care provider. Based on the extra-care model, Duddon Mews comprises six studio flats and eight two-bed apartments. The tenants have their own front door key and can come and go as they wish, with care staff on hand 24/7 to provide practical support and social care. 'You have friends all round. You don't have to go looking for people,' says Stella, one of the tenants.

## Reports

### **A better place for everyone**

Mental health promotion in schools can tackle stigma, increase knowledge and make schools more mentally healthy environments, say Vicky Essler and Theodore Stickley. In this article they report

outcomes from an awareness raising drama workshop with year 9 pupils in a large secondary school. Results showed a small increase in knowledge one month after the workshop. They conclude that further research is needed to see if there is a longer-term impact, and also to identify interventions that can bring about changes in attitudes as well as knowledge.

### Someone there to talk to

Mental health problems are rife among young homeless people, many of whom have been through the care system. A new report from the Mental Health Foundation details findings from interviews with young, homeless people and organisations working with them, to identify what they think would be helpful. First and foremost, staff and young people wanted easier access to mental health services and support, and to crisis intervention services, counselling and therapy in particular. Homelessness workers also wanted more training in mental health, and closer, integrated working with mental health services. The report criticises the lack of joined-up policy for this vulnerable group.

### Opening young minds

Northern Ireland has one of the youngest populations in the European Union, and an estimated one in five of its young people will experience mental health problems. Voluntary sector mental health service provider Action Mental Health carried out a survey of parents/guardians and professionals to identify the kinds of support they felt they needed in order to be able to respond better to young people's mental health needs. More information and more and better service provision offering faster access to specialist treatment before problems escalate were high on their lists. Schools also have a key role in providing life skills programmes and health promotion, say Roisin McCartan and Sarah Small of the MensSana specialist young people's programme run by AMH.

### The flick of a switch

Why do so many people fail to complete their prescribed course of psychotherapy? Tim Carey and colleagues decided to ask patients what happened for them when they started to feel better able to cope and no longer in need of treatment. They found that mostly people experienced a sudden 'Aha!' moment of revelation – a flash of insight or 'flick of a switch' – following a period of seeming impasse. Using perceptual control theory, they explain this as a mental process of internal conflict resolution. Psychotherapists should aim to provide clues to help people search for their own solutions, rather than provide the answers, they conclude, as much of the work of therapy in fact goes on outside sessions, when the person's mind is occupied with other matters.

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