

in this month's issue: **Sports for mental health** **Women in prison**
Choice and decision-making **Peer support and recovery**

[Click here to subscribe](#)

Features

Opportunity unlimited? ([click here to view this article](#))

Foundation trusts offer service users and carers the chance to have a real say in shaping the services their trust provides. So say supporters of this controversial government policy. The government wants all NHS trusts to have this quasi-autonomous status. Critics warn that it is part of a hidden agenda to privatise the NHS. Monitor, the national regulatory body, has announced the first three mental health trusts to be given foundation status, and another five are in the pipeline. MHT talks to chief executives, user-governors and critics about the benefits and risks.

Stolen lives

As the police announce some 200 arrests in a nationwide crackdown on sex trafficking, Julie Glassman reports the shock findings of a new report on the mental health of women who have been brought forcibly to the UK to work in the sex industry. Many women describe symptoms of PTSD similar to those of people who have experienced torture. Yet there is little therapeutic help on offer in the UK, and women seeking to escape risk being returned home to shame, ostracisation, threats to their own lives and their families, and the likelihood that they will once more be caught up in the traffickers' nets.

Leading by example

Consumer leaders – people with experience of mental health problems who are now running their own organisations providing support to other people recovering from mental illness – are a growing phenomenon in the US and New Zealand. MHT reports from the fourth annual meeting of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) in Edinburgh last month, and on an innovative pilot project in Scotland to train and place peer support workers in primary care settings.

Going for goals

Sport can radically improve people's mental health and contribute to their recovery, says the Bristol Active Life Project (BALP). The project, funded through a grant from the Football Foundation and a winner of the NIMHE Positive Practice Awards 2005, offers a weekly programme of sports activities for people with severe mental health problems: football, badminton, golf, basketball, tennis, walking and more, led by qualified coaches and using mainstream leisure centres and sports facilities. 'Once they start playing, they get a real buzz out of it like I do,' says Nick Parker, captain of the BALP five-a-side football team.

Reports

Offer us what we want

We need a user-led, user-informed debate about how best to respond to people who self-harm, argues Louise Pembroke. This article makes the case for harm minimisation as an effective approach and explores the dilemmas facing mental health workers and A&E staff. Health workers must accept and respect a person's need to self-injure as a way of surviving unbearable distress. Self-harm groups must on their part 'get out of their comfort zone of self-help' and engage with health professionals in working towards better provision in mainstream services, she argues.

Justice for women

Two in five women in prison have a history of mental health problems, half have experienced psychological and/or sexual abuse, 42% have been in care, and 21% are drug dependent. In this article Penny Butler and Dorothy Kousoulou outline how PCTs can meet their new responsibility for providing a mental health service to women in contact with the criminal justice system that is of equal standard to that available to the general public, both during and after imprisonment. A key priority must be to strengthen services that help women stay out of prison in the first place, they say.

Choice and decision-making

Choice underpins much of the government's agenda for the reform of the NHS, but does this extend to mental health services? Lesley Warner summarises key findings from a comprehensive review of the literature on choice and mental health and a small-scale survey. She concludes that, despite some examples of good practice, choice is 'by no means a reality for many who use mental health services' and that all those concerned – from government ministers to frontline staff – should be doing more to offer mental health service users the same level of choice about treatment options and care as people with physical health needs.

Help us do it our way

Graham Morgan reports the views of fellow members of the Highland Users Group (HUG) about recovery, what it means for them and what they think will help them achieve it. Key messages include 'Don't see us just as symptoms,' and 'Don't make us recover – take it slowly.' Some, however, worry that recovery is just another stick with which to beat people with long-term mental illnesses: 'Life is hard enough without having to develop our lives beyond our capabilities... it distorts the reality of mental illness.'

To subscribe to Mental Health Today call customer services on 0870 890 1080 quoting 'EBULL'. Feel free to forward a copy of this e-bulletin to a colleague or friend.

[Click here to subscribe](#)

To receive these as a monthly e-bulletin please send an email to: PavilionOnline@pavpub.com or [click here](#)