



columns

Psychiatrists and the media

I agree with the views of Dr Aslam (2007) encouraging colleagues to use the media as an educational tool. And I believe we can go one better by starting our own media organisations to output health information in various languages.

I help run Unity FM, a community radio station serving the Muslim population here in Birmingham. We broadcast programmes concerning both physical health and mental health issues. We also obtained some funding from a local primary care trust to run an infant mortality campaign recently.

If others wish to volunteer at the station, maybe as a guest to be interviewed on one of our shows, then please contact me.

ASLAN, N. (2007) Using the media as an educational tool. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **31**, 398.

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doi: 10.1192/pb.32.1.33

Assessment Unit in psychiatry -- a different way of working

With ever increasing budget restraints and firm emphasis on community treatment, South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust introduced the Assessment Unit in April 2005. It serves a dual purpose of gatekeeping and deciding appropriate care setting for patients.

Patients deemed likely to require admission, either by the on-call junior doctor or the community teams, are first admitted in this unit. Alternatives to in-patient treatments are explored and a comprehensive assessment of needs is conducted within a maximum of 72 hours. This ensures adequate utilisation of in-patient beds and also prioritises community treatment.

Tangible benefits in the past 2 years include a 36% reduction in admissions through accident and emergency units with an overall reduction of in-patient admissions of 42%. The average wait for allocation of beds has halved and use of out-of-area beds has been reduced to

zero. The downside has been an increase in average length of stay as an in-patient. This is understandable with a greater proportion of severely unwell patients on the wards now. A recent staff survey shows a high level of satisfaction with the unit and some of the main reasons highlighted are early input from senior medical staff and an alternative to in-patient care. Junior doctors particularly found this unit extremely helpful especially in complementing their out-of-hours work.

The trust also has had substantial financial benefit including closure of a 23 bed acute in-patient ward.

We feel this model of working has been successful in our trust and can possibly benefit others in similar situations.

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doi: 10.1192/pb.32.1.33a