

Changing Minds: Every Family in the Land

A new challenge for the future

Liz Cowan and Deborah Hart



After a gestation period of more than two years, the College is launching, on Wednesday 7 October 1998, a five-year national Campaign *Changing Minds: Every Family in the Land* which aims:

- (a) to increase public and professional understanding of six mental disorders (anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, alcohol and drug misuse, dementia and eating disorders);
- (b) to reduce the stigma and discrimination against people suffering from these disorders; and
- (c) to close the gap between the different beliefs of health care professionals and the public about useful treatments and intervention.

Why did the College choose the title *Changing Minds: Every Family in the Land*? There was considerable discussion within the Management Committee at the time of designing the logo and campaign title about the notion of 'every family in the land' and whether it would offend or alienate people. But while acknowledging that many sufferers may have lost contact with their families because of their illness or may never have had families, for most of us there is usually 'a skeleton in the family' – for instance we both have close relatives and friends who have suffered from mental health problems at some time in their lives – schizophrenia, depression and anorexia. How many members of the College chose psychiatry as a career because of close personal experience of mental illness? Yet how many of us admit to this, even within the profession itself?

The Campaign will aim to challenge the stereotypes and perceptions of people with a mental health problem including: dangerousness, self-infliction, prognosis and communication difficulties.

To this end, the Campaign carried out a national opinion survey with the Office for National Statistics in July 1998, the results of which will be outlined at the press launch on

7 October 1998 and will form the baseline for further surveys to be carried out at regular intervals throughout the Campaign.

The notion of 'stigma' towards people with mental health problems is of great concern to all professional and voluntary organisations working in this area and much has already been done. For instance MIND launched their RESPECT Campaign in 1997; the theme of World Mental Health Day 1998 (10 October) is on stigma; the World Health Organization has been working on an international project to reduce stigma and discrimination because of schizophrenia; and Focus on Mental Health (a consortium of organisations of which the College is a member, together with the Health Education Authority and the Department of Health) earlier this year organised a series of events on the stigma of mental illness.

The College has been meeting with MIND for the last year and it is hoped that both organisations will continue to work in partnership on countering stigma, as well as discrimination in such areas as employment and benefits.

The Campaign has established a number of working parties which are producing materials and projects aimed at the following target groups: doctors (including psychiatrists, as it is essential to put our own house in order), children and adolescents, employers and the media. A number of disorder-related projects have also been set up looking specifically at schizophrenia and depression.

The Campaign is keen to involve members in all its activities – so if you are interested in organising events or initiatives locally, please use our Campaign materials:

- (a) A series of booklets are to be launched at the Campaign's Press Conference on Wednesday 7 October. These challenge people's myths and misunderstandings about the six mental disorders, as well as including a general leaflet on the nature of stigma. Individual sets of these leaflets

- are available with an SAE for 64p from the Campaign Administrator at the College.
- (b) Posters (A3 size), which can be adapted for local use, are also available from the Campaign Administrator. For an individual copy of the poster, please send postage stamps to the value of 31p (multiple copies, maximum 5, 45p). E-mail address: stigma@rcpsych.ac.uk.

It is our intention to keep the membership regularly updated about new Campaign activities.

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NEW FROM GASKELL

Ethnicity: An Agenda for Mental Health

Edited by Dinesh Bhugra

This book sets the scene for identifying and meeting the mental health needs of black and minority ethnic groups. Clinicians, researchers, academics, hospital managers, commissioners and voluntary organisation workers come together to discuss the problems in health care delivery and the way of moving the agenda forward. In addition to multi-disciplinary working the key emphasis here is in involving commissioners and voluntary organisations in deciding how best to meet the needs of the communities.

FEATURES:

- setting the agenda for meeting the needs of minority ethnic groups
- multi-disciplinary input
- multi-speciality within psychiatry

READERSHIP: Mental health professionals, e.g. psychiatrists, trainees, nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists and social workers, healthcare managers

October 1998, £25.00, 262pp approx, Paperback, ISBN 1 901242 15 3

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