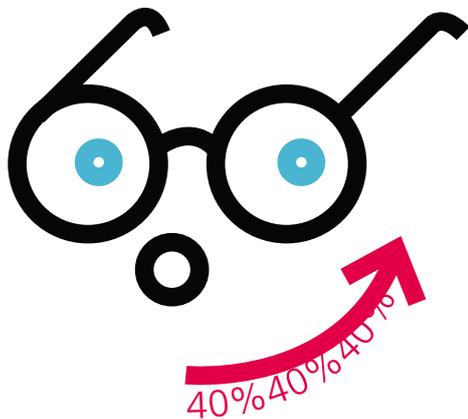


in brief...

# Mental illness and the NHS

A report by **Richard Layard** and colleagues has revealed the shocking scale of mental illness in Britain – and how little the NHS does about it.



Mental illness is now nearly a half of all ill health suffered by people in Britain aged under 65 – and it is more disabling than most chronic physical disease. Yet only a quarter of those experiencing mental health problems receive any form of treatment.

The under-treatment of people with crippling mental illnesses is the most glaring case of health inequality in our country. It is a shocking form of discrimination because although psychological treatments exist, they are not widely available.

Therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy lead to rapid recovery from depression or anxiety disorders in over 40% of cases. If they were more widely available, this would cost the NHS little or nothing because of the savings on physical healthcare. The cost would also be fully covered by savings on incapacity benefits and lost taxes.

For these reasons, the government started an excellent six-year programme in 2008 for Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT). This is making the situation much better than it was, especially in some areas. But in other areas, local commissioners are failing to fund the necessary expansion and are even cutting mental health provision, especially for children.

Our report calls for four major changes:

- First, it is essential that the IAPT programme is completed as planned, since even this will only provide for 15% of those in need.
- Second, beyond 2015, there should be another major expansion, aimed especially at the millions of people who have mental illness on top of chronic physical conditions.

- Third, the training of GPs needs to include a rotation in an IAPT service.

- Fourth, recruitment to psychiatry needs to be increased to handle the more complex cases.

The need for a rethink is urgent. At present, mental healthcare is, if anything, being cut: it should be expanded. This is a matter of fairness – to remedy a gross inequality – and it is a matter of simple economics – the net cost to the NHS would be very small. When everyone praises early intervention, it is particularly shocking that the sharpest cuts today are those affecting young people.

The NHS aims to save £20 billion on existing activities to finance new activities required by new needs, old unmet needs and new technology. Nowhere is the case for extra spending more strong than that for treating mental illness. In mental health, there is massive unmet need and there are new treatments that are only beginning to be rolled out. We appeal to commissioners to think again.



This article summarises 'How Mental Illness Loses Out in the NHS', a report by CEP's Mental Health Policy Group, a distinguished team of economists, psychologists, doctors and NHS managers convened by Richard Layard (<http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/special/cepsp26.pdf>).

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