Mental health should be the sixth pillar of the welfare state, Lord Layard will argue in a public lecture tomorrow evening, Tuesday 6 March 2012. Delivering the final Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) 21st birthday lecture at the LSE, he will say that:

‘Mental health lies at the root of so many of our social problems and yet it is shockingly neglected by our policy-makers. This will only change if there is a minister for mental health within the cabinet.’

Lord Layard will note that mental illness accounts for a half of all the illness experienced by people under 65. It is responsible for a half of all days off sick and for a half of all disabled people on incapacity benefit. It explains a large amount of criminal behaviour and educational underperformance. And unless treated, it is regularly transmitted from generation to generation.

But there are excellent treatments out there, which would in many cases cost nothing because of the resulting savings in social expenditure. Yet only a quarter of people with mental illness get treatment – compared with at least 90% for people with most physical diseases.

This shocking difference is mainly because the facilities are not there and NICE-recommended treatment cannot be provided. Only 15% of NHS expenditure is on mental illness. It is by common consent the Cinderella of the NHS.

Lord Layard will conclude:

‘One reason why we are no happier than we were in the 1950s is that despite huge advances in education, health and living standards, we have neglected the deep personal problems that hold so many people back.

‘This situation will not be altered without a radical change that reflects the importance of mental health in our national life. It requires a separate cabinet minister for mental health and social care within the Department of Health.’

ENDS

Notes for editors:
The lecture – ‘Mental Health: The New Frontier for the Welfare State’ by Richard Layard – will be given at the LSE at 6.30pm on Tuesday 6 March in the Sheikh Zayed Theatre and is open to the public.

The text of the lecture is available on request under embargo.

Lord Layard is director of the Wellbeing research programme at the LSE’s Centre for Economic Performance. He is an economist and a Labour peer.

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