

SIGNPOSTS TO INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS

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This research was commissioned by the South and West Health Care Libraries Unit with the aim of researching into the information needs and current access to information of community mental health workers within the south and west region. The goal was to use this research to produce signposts to information for this group in order to improve awareness of sources of information and services both locally and nationally for this often disadvantaged group.

This research was undertaken through a series of questionnaires with librarians and community mental health team managers and leaders throughout the region, and through interviews with members of community mental health teams (CMHTs) within Dorset Community NHS Trust and Dorset Health Care NHS Trust. The aim of the primary research was to identify current access to information sources, information needs, the extent of awareness of information and the importance of information for the work of the community mental health worker. This primary research was given validity and reliability by a literature review which outlined the main points from previous information need on similar groups.

The main findings can be summarised as follows:

- Community mental health workers tend to need information outside their normal field of work. The nature of their work means that this can happen frequently.
- Information is also needed for those on courses. The number of people on courses was surprisingly high and this increases the need and therefore intensifies the problems of access.
- Journals are the main formal source used. Informal sources such as colleagues and personal networks were often the first or only port of call.
- The majority of those interviewed felt that information was important, but not everyone felt the need for it on a regular basis. Updating was usually not a structured process, and depended upon individual motivation. The main problems were time and distance to the nearest library with relevant stock.
- Awareness of information sources varied both between individuals and between teams. The awareness of a team as a whole depended upon the motivation of the team leader/manager. Individual awareness tended to depend on individual motivation but also on whether the individual had recently undertaken any professional development.

These results were used to put together a model of a signpost, which would concentrate on improving awareness of sources and services both nationally and locally, thereby to some extent also improving access. Opinions were sought from various sources as to the most appropriate content, method of distribution and format of the signposts. A template was produced as the product of the research, outlining both national and local sources and services to be included within the signpost. Sections within the template include information about directories, voluntary and professional organisations, web sites and local libraries. The aim is to attempt to produce a booklet which will provide the community mental health worker with points of access to information outside their field, as well as highlighting sources and services as an encouragement to their use.

Recommendations of the project are that local sources and services are identified for each trust area or for each group of trusts within the south and west region, by a nominated person with a good knowledge of sources and services within that area. It is also recommended that signposts are produced in print booklet and web format and are updated on a regular basis. The printed booklets should be distributed around all CMHT bases and at libraries within the south and west region.

The project has successfully highlighted the specific needs of a specialised group of health service professionals. It is envisaged that the signpost package can be adopted and adapted for other regions in order to improve access and awareness of information for community mental health workers around the country.

The full report priced £25 is available from :
Sally Grant, Bournemouth University Library and Information Service, Dorset House, Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset BH12 5BB
Tel: 01202 595044