

The Economic Downturn and Forensic Psychiatry: What are the implications?

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1. Project Aim

1.1 To explore the impact of the recession on forensic psychiatry services across the United Kingdom and to encourage strategic thinking at the local and national level about how mental health professionals might respond to predicted funding cuts.

2. Overview

2.1 It is widely recognised that although demand for mental health services will probably increase (as a result of unemployment, personal debt, home repossession, offending and other forms of 'economic fallout'), that we are now witnessing the start of a period of funding cuts and disinvestment¹.

2.2 The NHS Confederation recently stated that the NHS is facing a severe contraction in its finance, with an estimated £8-10 billion real terms cut likely in the three years from 2011¹. This will have significant consequences for those commissioning, providing, and using services.

2.3 Forensic Psychiatry services in England are largely based around high cost, low volume inpatient based services. Previously, such services have been easy targets for cuts. This project will explore the challenges and the opportunities for forensic psychiatry services in a time of recession and significant cuts over the coming years.

3. Project Background

3.1 The College is currently working to address the likely implications of future funding cuts upon mental health services and to highlight the challenges that psychiatrists may face in the future. In early September 2009, the College held an event to explore what impact the recession was having on mental health and to discuss solutions for those working at a local and national level in service provision and policy.

3.2 This event was held in collaboration with the National Health Service (NHS) Confederation Mental Health Network and the London School of Economics and Political Science. The recently published

¹ NHS Confederation, Dealing with the Downturn, Paper 4, June 2009.

report² from this event highlights the priorities for government, commissioners and service providers, and identifies priorities for operational and systemic efficiencies.

3.3 Building on this ongoing College initiative, the Forensic Faculty Executive Committee and the College's Policy Unit are undertaking a survey of clinical directors of forensic mental health services in the United Kingdom.

3.4 The aim of this project is to determine whether the recession is already having an impact at the local level; to ascertain what likely impact funding cuts might have upon forensic mental health services; and to explore any concerns that may be emerging from psychiatrists and other professionals working within forensic psychiatry services.

4. The Economic Down-turn and Forensic Psychiatry

4.1 Forensic Psychiatry services in England are largely based around high cost, low volume inpatient based services. Previously, such services have been easy targets for cuts. However it should be recognised that forensic psychiatry services have undergone a significant period of growth over the past five to ten years.

5. Project Delivery

5.1 The Forensic Faculty Executive Committee and the College Policy Unit are undertaking a survey of clinical directors of forensic services across the United Kingdom. The results of this survey will be presented at a workshop at the Forensic Faculty Annual Residential Meeting in February 2010.

5.2 The survey results will be anonymised and quantitative data will be presented in an aggregated format. The survey findings will be used to facilitate further discussion around this agenda, and the workshop will be an opportunity to explore these issues from both a Trust and a Commissioners' perspective. A final report will be published following the Residential Meeting.

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² Mental Health and the Economic Downturn: National Priorities and NHS Solutions