Can we EVER eradicate stigma?

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to the
Royal College of Psychiatrists, Eastern Division
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Introduction
Kathy’s Story
Terry’s Story
Group Discussion
How do you think the situation was actually handled?

How do you think that person felt?

What do you think they hoped for?

How would you have dealt with the situation?
Scenario 1

- 20 year old student returns to college sick bay after 10 day admission to hospital following a huge overdose. She had been found by the college porters in her room, unconscious, three days after her suicide attempt. The first person she meets on her return is the college sister.
“Oh, so you’re here then. I wouldn’t try to do something here in sick bay. The knives we have are far too blunt and you’d be hacking away for hours!”
Scenario 2

51 year old woman, recently moved into a one bedroomed council flat. No kitchen facilities, away from friends and family, car illegal, on benefits, very depressed. Feeling suicidal and not yet registered with a new GP, she phones the last psychiatrist she saw.
What was actually said...

“You’re an intelligent lady, I’m sure you’ll think of something.”
Scenario 3

- Woman has her first appointment at the clinic with a new CPN. She says “I think I have a hoarding problem and I don’t know where to start”.
What was actually said...

“Get rid of the things that are weighing you down and then you can fly away like a fairy!”
A service user was referred to a psychiatrist by her GP for her long term depression. She had been on the same antidepressant for 10 years and felt it was no longer effective. After two years of unemployment she had just secured a part-time job. She sees the psychiatrist in his clinic.
But you’ve got a job now, so keep taking the tablets and try not to think so much.”
Stigma demonstrated by professionals...

- Dismissive of everything!
- Condescending attitudes
- Very few questions asked
- No shared decision making
Self-stigma... \textit{(how it makes us feel)}

- Unworthy of help
- Totally inadequate & despondent
- Anxious & stressed
- Dominated by ruminations
- Dismissed by everyone
Conclusion
How we would like to be treated

- Treat us as human beings...
  - with dignity, parity and respect

- Be careful with your words...
  - clumsy words can last a lifetime

- Do not be dismissive...
  - our self-esteem is low enough!
And finally...
So, can we EVER eradicate stigma?

Probably not for a long time but...

we can go a long way towards reducing it

help reduce self-stigma among service users

it needs to start with the professionals

We all need to take responsibility for the part

we can play in the reduction of stigma

Both patients and professionals
Thanks for listening!