

THE  TIMES
Letters to the Editor

January 24 2014

Mental health — and how the other half lives

Sir, Over the past 40 years the UK has led the way in the development of specialist mental health services for older people. Mental illness affects about 10 per cent of older people and we are concerned that the UK is beginning to dismantle these services and move the care of older people



with mental illness into “ageless” (or age-inclusive or age-blind) services, where an 18-year-old and 80-year-old may be treated in the same service. A recent survey found that around 10 per cent of respondents had already undergone significant merger into ageless adult services and a similar number reported this was imminent.

The reasons for this change are unclear — it may simply be an attempt to save money — but there is no evidence to support the move to age inclusive mental health services. In fact a recent survey showed ageless services are detrimental to patient care.

Old-age mental health services are not just about managing dementia — around 40 per cent of patients in older adults services have illnesses other than dementia (such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety). We therefore believe that specialism of old-age psychiatry — with a specifically trained, skilled workforce for older people with mental illness — should be the vehicle for the provision of age-appropriate non-discriminatory services to all our older population.

We call upon health providers in the UK to halt to the development of “ageless” mental health services, and ensure old-age services are protected.

Signed by:

Dr James Warner, Royal College of Psychiatrists;

Dr Nori Graham, Alzheimer’s Disease International;

Professor Carlos Augusto de Mendonça Lima, European Association of Psychiatry ;

Professor Henry Brodaty, International Psychogeriatric Association;

Professor Gabriela Stoppe, Chair of the Section of Old Age Psychiatry of the World Psychiatric Association, Switzerland;

Professor Luis Agüera-Ortiz, President of the Spanish Association of Psychogeriatrics, Spain;

Professor Dame Sue Bailey, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists, UK;

Professor R.C. Baldwin, Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist & Honorary Professor of Psychiatry, UK;

Professor Yoram Barak, Director of Abarbanel Mental Health Centre, Israel;

Professor Vincent Camus, Past president, Section of Old Age Psychiatry, World Psychiatric Association, France;

Dr Peter Carter, Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, UK;

Dr Jane Casey, Bi-national Chair, Faculty of Psychiatry of Old Age Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Australia;

Professor Helen Chiu, President, Hong Kong Psychogeriatric Association, Hong Kong;

Professor Edmond Chiu, University of Melbourne, Australia;

Professor Knut Engedal, University of Oslo, Norway;

Professor Lia Fernandes MD, PhD, APG Past President, Portugal;

Professor Horacio Firmino, President of European Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, Portugal;

Professor Vinod Gangolli, Dean of Academics, Masina Hospital, Byculla, Mumbai, India;

Dr George Grossberg, Past-President, American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, Past-President, International Psychogeriatric Association, US;

Lars Gustafson, Professor Emeritus, Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, Clinical Sciences, Lund University, Lund, Sweden; Professor

Dr Hans Gutzmann, President of The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Gerontopsychiatrie und -Psychotherapie (DGGPP), Germany;

Dr Cécile Hanon, Chair of the Committee of Education European Psychiatric Association, France;

Professor Reinhard Heun, Professor of Psychiatry, UK;

Professor Ralf Ihl, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Duesseldorf, Germany;

Professor Aleksandra Milićević Kalašić, Co-Chair Old Age Psychiatry Section, World Psychiatric Association, Serbia;

Professor Paul Knight, President, British Geriatric Society, London, UK;

Professor Vladimirs Kuznecovs, Head of LPA Geriatric Section, Latvia;

Professor Jerzey Leszek, Founder President of Polish Geriatric Psychiatry Association, Poland;

Professor Gabriel Ivbijaro, President Elect World Federation for Mental Health, UK;

Dr Manuel Martin-Carrasco, Coordinator, Working Group on Dementia, Spanish Society of Psychiatry, Spain;

Professor Antonio Palha; Past President of Portuguese Society of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Portugal;

Dr Carmelle Peisah, University of New South Wales, Australia;

Dr Felix CV Potocnik, Head of Special Interest Group in Old Age Psychiatry, South African Society of Psychiatrists, South Africa;

Dr Joel Sadavoy, Founding President of the Canadian Academy of Geriatric Psychiatry, Canada;

Dr Duarte dos Santos Falcao, President, Portuguese Gerontopsychiatry Association, Portugal;

Dr Nicoleta Tataru, President of Romanian Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, Romania;

Marco Trabucchi, President, Associazione Italiana di Psicogeriatra, Italy;

Professor Catalina Tudose, President of Romanian Alzheimer's Society, Romania;

Professor Franz Verrey , Maastricht University Medical Center, The Netherlands;

Professor Armin von Gunten, Vice-President, Swiss Society for Old-Age Psychiatry, Switzerland