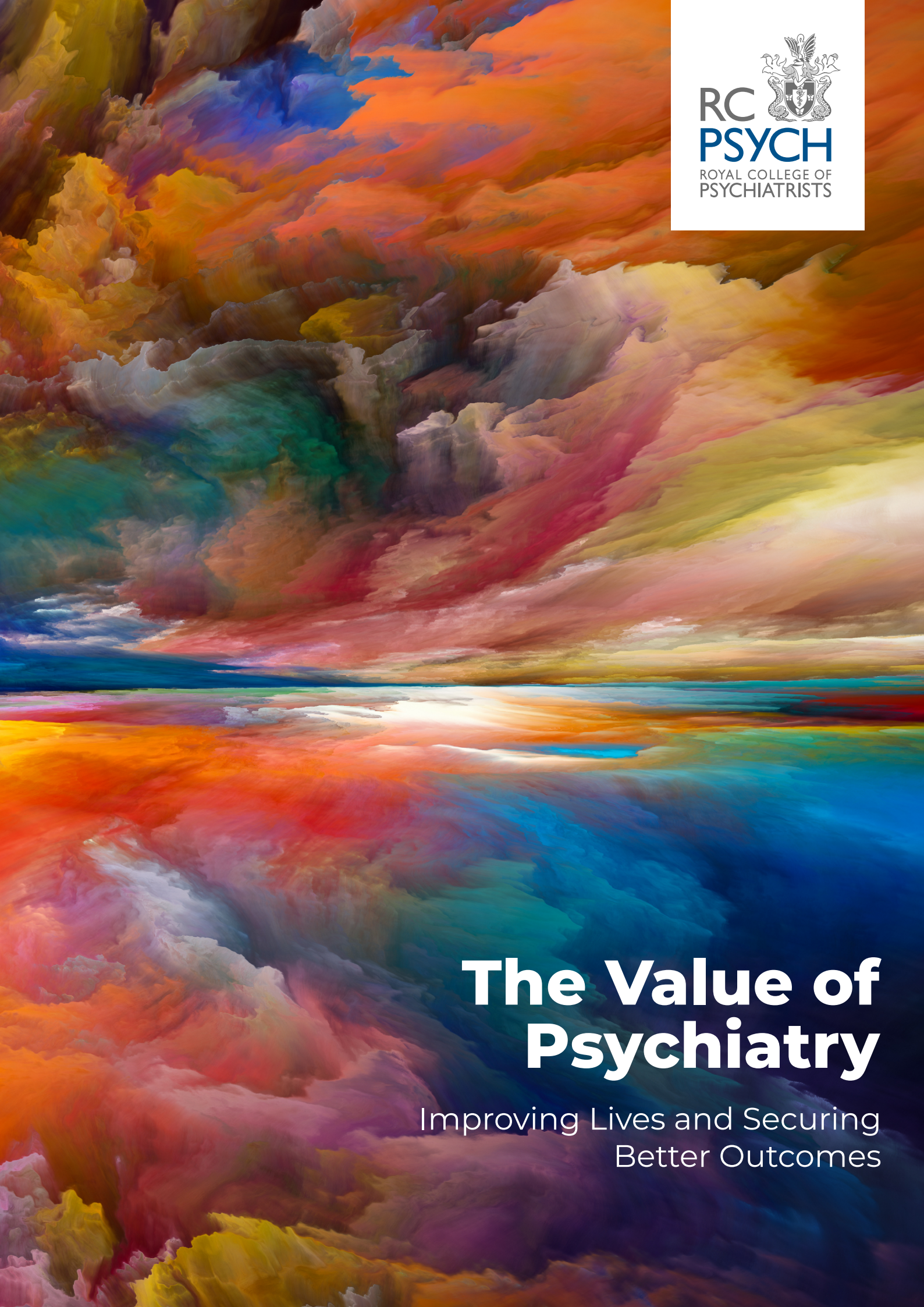


RC PSYCH
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

The Value of Psychiatry

Improving Lives and Securing Better Outcomes

About the College

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the professional medical body responsible for supporting psychiatrists.

We work to secure the best outcomes for people with mental illness, intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders promoting excellent mental health services, supporting the prevention of mental illness, training outstanding psychiatrists, promoting quality and research, setting standards and being the voice of our members and the profession.

The College sets standards for psychiatric training and practice, supports world-leading research, develops clinical guidance, improves quality across mental health services, and works with governments and healthcare partners to improve mental health outcomes across the UK and internationally.

Representing over 22,000 members and with approximately 1,600 mental health services signed up to our quality networks, we work in all four nations of the UK, as well as supporting members internationally.

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President's Foreword

As I begin my term as President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, I am proud to represent a profession that makes a difference to millions of lives every day.

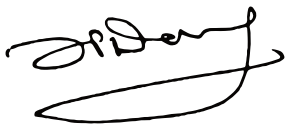
Throughout my career as a psychiatrist, I have seen the difference that timely, compassionate and evidence-based mental healthcare can make, and the avoidable consequences when people are unable to access the support they need. This is particularly true for people with severe mental illness who continue to experience some of the poorest physical and mental health outcomes and face some of the greatest barriers to care. These experiences have reinforced my belief that mental health needs more than parity of esteem. It requires a fundamental recognition that improving the population's mental health is an essential building block of our nation's health and wellbeing.

Today, there is greater awareness of the importance of mental wellness and increasing recognition of the need for effective mental healthcare, and that is something to welcome. Yet severe mental illness, psychiatry and the role psychiatrists play are often less well understood, and outdated stereotypes continue to influence public perceptions of the profession and mental illness.

As medically trained doctors, psychiatrists combine advances in medicine, neuroscience and research with an understanding of the psychological, biological and social factors that influence mental health, enabling them to support people with some of the most complex health conditions in society.

What continues to inspire me about psychiatry is its ability and ambition to seek answers to the big questions our society faces today- such as the links between psychological and social factors and their impact on individual brain and body pathology. It is a profession built on evidence, innovation and clinical expertise, but also on listening, understanding and working collaboratively with people at some of the most important moments in their lives – a great example of combining science with humanity.

This pamphlet aims to provide an introduction to psychiatry, the breadth of the profession and the many ways psychiatrists make a difference every day. Whether you are a parliamentarian, policymaker, journalist, stakeholder or simply interested in understanding more about psychiatry and mental illness, I hope it offers a useful insight into our profession and the contribution it makes. As demand for mental healthcare continues to grow, there has never been a more important time to recognise the value of psychiatry. By investing in our workforce and ensuring people can access timely, high-quality care, we have an opportunity to improve lives, strengthen communities and create a healthier future for all.



Professor Subodh Dave
President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists



Why Mental Health Matters

Mental illness is one of the leading causes of ill health in the United Kingdom. In England, **around one in four people experience a mental health problem each year**, affecting individuals, families, communities and the economy.

Unlike physical illnesses, which primarily affect middle-aged and older adults, **half of all mental illnesses begin before the age of 14 and three quarters before the age of 24**. This means that supporting children and young people early is one of the most effective ways of improving outcomes and promoting lifelong mental health. We know that **early intervention matters**. When people can access the right support and treatment at the right time, there is greater opportunity to improve outcomes, prevent crises and reduce the longer-term impact of mental illness. Conversely, failing to intervene early risks dramatically impacting the most productive years of one's life.

Mental health affects every aspect of our lives. It influences how people learn, work, care for their families and participate in society. **When mental health needs go unmet, the effects are felt far beyond the individual**, with consequences for healthcare, housing, employment and social care, and the wider economy.

> **I know I can say with absolute truth that psychiatry saved my life at its lowest moment. I don't believe I would be here today if it were not for the psychiatrist who rescued me.**

The Economic and Social Value of Psychiatry

Mental ill-health is estimated to cost England around **£300 billion each year**. While the economic impact is significant, the human cost is even greater. Effective mental healthcare helps people recover from illness, maintain relationships, stay connected to their communities, remain in education and employment, and live healthier, more fulfilling lives. The benefits are felt not only by individuals, but by families, communities and society as a whole.

£300bn a year

cost of mental ill-health to England

Understanding Mental Health and Mental illness

Mental illness is not a single condition. It includes a wide range of disorders that vary in their symptoms, severity and impact. While some people may benefit from short-term support, others require ongoing specialist care. Recognising these differences is essential to ensuring people receive the right treatment and support when they need it.

Common Mental Health Problems

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a normal human feeling that we all experience when faced with threatening or difficult situations. However, when these feelings become persistent or overwhelming, they can interfere with everyday life. Anxiety disorders include panic attacks, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

Psychiatrists help people understand their symptoms, establish an accurate diagnosis and access the most appropriate treatment, which may include medication, psychological therapies or a combination of approaches.

Mood Disorders

Also known as affective disorders, mood disorders involve significant disturbances in mood and emotional wellbeing. Common examples include depression and bipolar disorder. Depression can affect mood, motivation, enjoyment, sleep and concentration, often making everyday activities, work, education and relationships more difficult, while bipolar disorder is characterised by periods of depression and episodes of elevated mood or energy (mania).

Psychiatrists play an important role in diagnosing mood disorders, developing treatment plans and supporting people to manage their condition and maintain their quality of life.

Severe Mental Health Conditions

Psychotic disorders

Psychosis occurs when someone experiences or interprets reality differently from those around them. Symptoms may include hallucinations, delusions, difficulties with concentration and changes in thinking or behaviour. Psychotic disorders include schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder.

Psychiatrists provide specialist assessment, treatment and ongoing support for people experiencing psychosis, helping to reduce the impact of symptoms and improve long-term outcomes.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses characterised by difficult relationships with food, eating and body image. They can affect people of any age, gender or background and include conditions such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, compulsive eating and binge eating disorder.

Psychiatrists work as part of multidisciplinary teams to support both the mental and physical health needs of people with eating disorders, helping to ensure treatment is safe, effective and tailored to the individual.

What Is Psychiatry and What Do Psychiatrists Do

Psychiatry is the branch of medicine concerned with the **diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness.**

Psychiatrists are **medically qualified doctors** whose first two years of postgraduate training include working in general medicine or surgery. They then undertake at least six years of specialist training in the mental and physical manifestations of psychological and behavioural disorders. This training equips them to assess, diagnose and treat a wide range of mental health conditions, including common mental health disorders, severe mental illness and substance use disorders.

Psychiatrists work across hospitals, community services, schools, prisons and care homes, supporting people with a wide range of mental health conditions throughout their lives. They also contribute their expertise in a range of specialist environments, including humanitarian and disaster areas, aviation and maritime, sports fields, and the creative arts and media. This diversity of practice reflects the many ways mental health intersects with everyday life and the wide range of settings in which specialist support may be needed.

Central to psychiatric practice is a **holistic and person-centred approach**. Psychiatrists develop an understanding that brings together biological, psychological, social and environmental factors to build a comprehensive picture of a person's difficulties, strengths and needs. This enables care to be tailored to the individual, recognising that people are more than a diagnosis or a set of symptoms.

Psychiatrists are uniquely trained to assess the relationship between mental and physical health, understand the risks and benefits of different treatment options, and support people with some of the most complex health needs in society. Their expertise helps ensure people receive accurate diagnoses, appropriate treatment and coordinated care, improving outcomes while reducing wider pressures on health and public services.

Consultant psychiatrists often lead multidisciplinary teams, working alongside psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers and other healthcare professionals to provide high-quality care. They also play an important role in training the next generation of psychiatrists and supporting the wider mental health workforce.

Psychiatry At Every Stage of Life

Mental health needs change throughout life, and psychiatrists support people from childhood through to older age. Psychiatrists work with people from all backgrounds and in a wide range of settings, combining medical expertise with an understanding of the psychological, biological, social and environmental factors that influence mental health.

Psychiatrists work with people of all ages and from all walks of life, helping them navigate some of the most challenging periods of their lives.

For children and young people, mental health challenges can affect development, education and relationships. Early support can make a lasting difference. Psychiatrists work alongside families, schools and other services to help young people manage conditions such as anxiety disorders, eating disorders and severe mental illness, supporting recovery and helping them reach their full potential.

As people move through life, different experiences and transitions can influence mental health. For women, factors such as puberty, pregnancy, the postnatal period, menopause and experiences of gender-based violence can have a significant impact on mental health. Understanding these influences is an important part of providing personalised and effective care.

Psychiatrists also support people with intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism and ADHD. They are more likely to experience co-occurring mental health difficulties and often face significant health inequalities, including poorer physical health outcomes and shorter life expectancy. Access to specialist, timely and comprehensive psychiatric care can play an important role in ensuring mental health needs are recognised early, appropriately assessed and effectively treated.

In later life, people may face challenges associated with ageing, dementia, long-term physical illness, bereavement or social isolation. Psychiatrists play a vital role in helping older adults maintain their independence, dignity and quality of life while supporting those living with complex mental health needs.



Types of Psychiatry



Child & adolescent psychiatry



General adult psychiatry



Old age psychiatry



Forensic psychiatry



Addiction psychiatry



Perinatal psychiatry



Intellectual disability psychiatry



Liaison psychiatry



Eating disorders



Neuropsychiatry

The breadth of psychiatry reflects the diversity of the people it serves. Alongside specialties such as child and adolescent psychiatry, general adult psychiatry, addictions, eating disorders, perinatal mental health, forensic psychiatry, intellectual disability psychiatry, old age psychiatry and neuropsychiatry, psychiatrists also contribute to areas including digital health, sport and exercise, occupational mental health, the arts and international mental health. This breath enables psychiatry to respond to a wide range of mental health needs across society.

Advancing Mental Health

Psychiatrists make a difference not only through the care they provide, but through the research, innovation and leadership that shape mental healthcare across the UK.

Many of the treatments, services and approaches that are now central to mental healthcare have been developed, tested or improved through psychiatric research. From improving our understanding of depression, psychosis and dementia, to advancing suicide prevention and patient safety, psychiatrists have played an important role in improving outcomes for millions of people. Research has also helped ensure mental healthcare is grounded in the best available evidence.

Psychiatrists are also helping to shape how services are designed, commissioned and delivered. Through the Royal College of Psychiatrists' National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (NCCMH), psychiatrists work alongside clinicians, researchers, policymakers and people with lived experience to develop clinical guidance, service frameworks and workforce standards that improve care across the NHS. The Community Mental Health Framework, developed through the NCCMH, has helped establish a new vision for integrated, community-based mental healthcare, bringing together health services, social care, voluntary organisations and local support networks around the needs of the individual.

Alongside its work on policy and service development, the College helps improve the quality of care delivered across mental health services. Through the College's Centre for Quality Improvement (CCQI), it supports quality improvement programmes, accreditation networks and service reviews that help services learn from one another and continually improve patient care.

A core part of psychiatry is recognising that mental health is shaped by wider social, economic and environmental factors. Housing, education, employment, poverty, justice and social care can all have a profound impact on both mental wellbeing and recovery. Increasingly, psychiatrists are working with governments, local authorities, public services and community organisations to help ensure mental health is considered across policy and decision-making.

Research and Innovation

Research remains fundamental to the future of mental healthcare. Advances in neuroscience, genomics, digital health, artificial intelligence, precision medicine and data science are creating new opportunities to improve diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness.

Improving mental healthcare requires more than scientific discovery. It depends on sustained investment, strong partnerships and a workforce capable of translating new knowledge into better care. Psychiatrists play an important role in this process by developing new treatments, evaluating services, training future clinicians and ensuring that the best available evidence informs everyday practice. In doing so, they help improve outcomes for patients today while shaping the treatments and services of the future.

Supporting the next generation of psychiatrists is equally important. As demand for mental healthcare continues to grow, the profession must be able to attract, train and retain talented doctors, researchers and clinical academics who will lead future improvements in care, research and innovation.

Psychiatry in Action



Improving care for psychosis

Research helped establish early intervention services, enabling people to receive specialist support earlier and improving long-term recovery.



Reducing Suicide and Self-harm

Psychiatric research has informed prevention strategies, crisis care and shaped national policy that help identify risk earlier and provide timely support.



Supporting People Living with Dementia

Research led by psychiatrists has improved treatment, reduced inappropriate prescribing and helped people maintain their independence and quality of life for longer.



Building Better Community Care

The Community Mental Health Framework is helping create more integrated and personalised care closer to home, bringing together health services, health, social care and community organisations around the needs of the individual.



Supporting People into Employment

Meaningful employment can play an important role in recovery and wellbeing. Psychiatrists work alongside GPs, employers, occupational health services and wider mental health teams to help people remain in or return to work supporting workplace adjustments and recovery plans where appropriate.



Improving Housing and Stability

Stable housing is often essential to recovery. Psychiatrists often work alongside local authorities, housing providers and voluntary organisations to help ensure people have accommodation that supports their recovery. For people with severe mental illness, supported housing is often a key part of the treatment pathway, providing stability while helping people live more independently. Without secure housing, recovery can become much more difficult, and the risk of crisis or hospital admission can increase.



Closing the Physical Health Gap

People living with severe mental illness experience some of the poorest physical health outcomes in society. On average, **they die 15-20 years earlier than the general population**, often because of preventable physical health conditions. Psychiatrists work closely with GPs and other healthcare professionals to ensure physical health is considered alongside mental health throughout assessment, treatment and ongoing care. Initiatives such as Equally Well are helping drive improvements in the physical health outcomes and reduce this inequality.

Challenging Misconceptions and Stigma

Despite growing awareness of mental health, many misconceptions about mental illness and psychiatry remain. While public attention to common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression has increased in recent years, the impact of stigma and misunderstanding is often most acute for people living with severe mental illness, who continue to experience significant discrimination and disadvantage.

These misconceptions have real-world consequences. They can shape how mental illness is understood, how people are treated, and whether they feel able to seek support. For people with severe mental illness, stigma and discrimination can create barriers to employment, housing, healthcare, relationships and opportunities to participate fully in the community. Alongside physical health inequalities, these barriers contribute to poorer health outcomes and reduced life expectancy. They are not inevitable and can be addressed through better care, earlier intervention and a greater understanding of mental illness.

Misunderstandings do not only affect people living with mental illness. Psychiatry itself is often misunderstood. Despite being a medical specialty grounded in scientific evidence, public perceptions are sometimes shaped by outdated stereotypes about psychiatrists and the treatment of mental illness. Improving understanding of psychiatry is important if we are to tackle stigma, build confidence in mental healthcare and ensure people receive the support they need.

Psychiatrists play an important role in challenging stigma and improving understanding. Through clinical care, research, education and public engagement, they help ensure that people experiencing mental illness are **seen as individuals rather than defined by a diagnosis**. With timely, evidence-based care and holistic support, many people go on to lead fulfilling lives. Creating a more accurate understanding of severe mental illness is essential to reducing discrimination and improving outcomes.

Myth vs. Reality

Myth: Mental illness only affects certain types of people

Reality: Mental illnesses are medical conditions influenced by a combination of biological, psychological and social factors. Like physical illnesses, they can affect anyone and often respond well to treatment and support.

Myth: People with severe mental illness cannot recover

Reality: Recovery is possible. Many people with severe mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia live fulfilling lives, maintain employment, build relationships and participate fully in their communities when they receive the right support and treatment.

Myth: Psychiatry is just about prescribing medication

Reality: Psychiatrists use a wide range of evidence-based approaches, including psychological therapies, social interventions, physical healthcare and medication where appropriate. They work closely with multidisciplinary teams to provide holistic care.

Myth: Psychiatry is not a scientific specialty

Reality: Psychiatry is a medical specialty grounded in scientific evidence. Psychiatric research has transformed our understanding of mental illness, improved treatments, informed public policy and delivered better outcomes for patients across the UK and beyond.

Why This Matters

Reducing stigma is about more than changing attitudes. It is about improving access to care, tackling inequalities and ensuring that everyone experiencing mental illness receives the support, opportunity and respect they deserve.

When people fear being judged, misunderstood or labelled because of their condition, they may delay seeking help, increasing the risk of crisis and making recovery more difficult. In some cases, people may begin to internalise these attitudes, making it harder to believe that recovery is possible or that treatment will help. Challenging stigma is therefore essential to improving outcomes, reducing inequalities and helping more people access support before they reach crisis point.

Creating a society that understands mental illness more accurately benefits not only individuals and families, but also communities, workplaces and public services. Greater understanding can help remove barriers to employment, housing, healthcare and social participation, enabling more people to achieve their potential and contribute fully to society.

The Future of Mental Health

Psychiatry has transformed countless lives and contributed significantly to our understanding of mental illness. Yet major challenges remain. Demand for mental healthcare continues to grow, while too many people still face delays in accessing treatment, unequal access to care and significant variation in outcomes depending on where they live.

We have a clearer understanding than ever before of what helps prevent mental illness, improve outcomes and support recovery. The challenge for the years ahead is ensuring that this knowledge is translated into timely, effective and evidence-based care. Too often, people receive support only once they have reached crisis point. A sustainable mental health system must place greater emphasis on prevention, early intervention and timely access to effective treatment, helping people get the support they need before problems become more severe.

Mental healthcare must also become more equitable. Mental illness does not affect everyone equally, and factors such as poverty, their individual characteristics, adverse experiences and social circumstances can all influence both mental health and access to care. Services that recognise and respond to these differences will be better placed to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

At the same time, mental health cannot be viewed in isolation. Housing, employment, education, physical health and social support all have a profound impact on wellbeing and recovery. Psychiatrists are uniquely placed to understand how these factors interact and influence people's lives, helping to ensure care is tailored to the individual rather than a single diagnosis or set of symptoms. Lasting progress will therefore depend on stronger collaboration across healthcare, public services, employers, communities and government.

Research and innovation will continue to play a vital role. Advances in science and technology offer exciting opportunities to improve prevention, diagnosis and treatment. The challenge now is ensuring that these advances are translated into everyday practice so that patients and communities can benefit from them.

The future of mental healthcare also depends on people. Alongside investment in services and research, there must be a sustained commitment to attracting, training and retaining talented psychiatrists. Ensuring a clear pathway into the profession will be essential if we are to meet rising demand and provide high-quality care for future generations.

Ultimately, the future of mental health depends on the choices we make today. Everyone should be able to access effective, high-quality mental healthcare when they need it, regardless of who they are or where they live. **By investing in psychiatrists, services, prevention and evidence-based care, we can build a mental health system that is more equitable, more effective and better equipped to meet the needs of future generations. Psychiatry will continue to play a central role in that future, improving lives and securing better outcomes for people.**

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