



**WAMH in PC** Wales Mental Health in Primary Care

## Introduction to the essential characteristics report

We would like to introduce this report to you which has been commissioned by WAMH in PC. It looks at the experiences and feelings of GPs and mental health practitioners in North Wales but we feel the evidence it has produced is applicable across Wales. There are key messages for policy makers in this report as it shows how professionals from widely different backgrounds view the services they work in and how policy can impact on their performance. The report uses scientifically proven qualitative research techniques and was commissioned by WAMH in PC to look at the key components needed to create an effective primary care service. The report is not long and we feel that it would be extremely valuable to read it in its entirety but in particular we wished to bring the following points to your attention.

The 'essential characteristics' are shown in bold below. We suggest/urge those colleagues involved in developing, drafting, and issuing policy and good practice documents to consider these characteristics in any future work undertaken concerning primary care based mental health services and their arrangements.

- That the **knowledge and training of primary care staff** will be a key area of improvement and work in this key area will give opportunities for bridge building and improve communication and relationships that have suffered in the last decade.
- That time is a major issue for all workers and that **sufficient time needs to be given to patients with mental health problems** (who account for up to 30% of all consultations). An increase in time available will have workload issues and if GPs extend consultation length then this will have work force planning and resource allocation implications.
- That any new services will need to be based on a **sound communication plan with clearly identified roles** and that expectations are managed proactively as there already exist problems in this area with existing services.
- **Access to services** will have to be prompt and appropriate with barriers removed to ensure the same level of access to all patients.
- **Continuity of care** is an important area for patients and needs to be protected where possible to ensure patients do not get "serial assessments".
- GPs feel the need to be able to contact and liaise with consultant colleagues occasionally and that this needs to be made available in some form.

- That resources in terms of time, money, personnel, therapies and support will need to be invested to make sure a service is fit for purpose. Not to do so will increase professional frustration, and risk burn out and fatigue in mental health practitioners.
- Strenuous efforts need to be made to create a **whole-person service** that does not leave holes where patients are lost or do not fit accessibility criteria.
- The service has to be **patient / person-centred and not criteria focussed** so the real needs of the patient are paramount, not the needs and capabilities of the service. In the recent past patients have had to try and fit the service delivery profile and often have not received a service which helps them cope with their complex problems.
- New services have to provide access to modern evidence based interventions in line with NICE guidance as primary care staff in Wales have struggled for a long time to look after their patients in an evidence based way.
- We feel that these messages fit within the three hallmarks developed by WAMH in PC. These are **Trust, communication and person centredness**. This report again highlights the importance of these three factors in creating services that really help patients as well as provide an environment that works for all the professionals working within it. It also stresses the importance of investing in primary care mental health to ensure that secondary care services are not overwhelmed. This will require investments in training, resources and support for primary care services.

We have evidence from the 2011 National Survey of GPs and Practice Nurses on attitudes toward mental health, plus views and opinions gained from Service-users and carers on 'what works well in primary care mental health', which support the value of ensuring the 'essential characteristics' are locally evident.

Kind regards



**Dr Mark Boulter**

**Chair of WaMH in PC**

*(Wales Mental Health in Primary Care Network)*