



Information for people with mental health problems

This factsheet gives a guide to some of the services available from Adult and Community Services and the NHS in Dorset for people with a mental illness and their carers.

What is mental illness?

Occasional anxiety, grief, stress or depression is common to us all, but we usually 'get back to normal' relatively quickly. For some people though, these feelings may be unusually intense or prolonged and can seriously affect their ability to cope with the demands of their everyday life. They may also experience extreme mood swings, feelings of persecution or hear voices that no one else hears.

In the same way as a physical illness, mental illness can be mild and easily treated, or more serious and need lengthy treatment. There are many different types of mental illness and people react to their illness in different ways, but most people become well again, with the right treatment and support.

Mental illness can affect anyone at any time. It is very common, and it's possible that you or someone in your family will be affected at some time in your lives. Mental illness can be very worrying and upsetting for the person with the illness and also for their family, friends and carers. They may all need some support and someone to talk to.

Accessing services

It is often difficult to admit to a mental illness and even more difficult to ask for help. **In the first instance please talk to your GP.**

GPs may refer people with less severe illness to a counsellor or therapist within primary care, or signpost to a voluntary



organisation, who may be able to help them solve their problems, by talking things through.

People with developing serious mental illness will be referred to their local Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) by a health professional. Everyone being treated by the specialist mental health services in the community is supported by members of one of Dorset's joint community teams. The teams are partnerships between Adult and Community Services and the Health Service and include social workers, specially trained in dealing with mental illness, community psychiatric nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists and support workers.

The team uses the care programme approach. They work closely with the person with mental illness, their family and carers, putting together a care plan that suits the needs of the person who is ill and helps them and their family live as normal a life as possible.

The care plan names a care professional from the CMHT, who will be the regular contact within the team. It also clearly sets out how to get help in an emergency.

The care programme approach is the way in which the specialist mental health services help you. It means that they can offer a range of help and support to assist your recovery from mental illness, or return to independent living. As well as arrangements for your psychiatric care, treatment and medication, your care plan could include practical help, support or advice on housing, employment, personal relationships, money matters and benefits.

Advocacy

It's often helpful for someone who has a mental illness to have a relative, friend or carer present during discussions about their treatment and care. If there is no one suitable to support you, the Dorset Mental Health Advocacy Service can provide someone to help (telephone 01305 261483).

Treatment

The nature of a person's mental illness and how severe it is will determine the kind of treatment that is best for them. This can include:



- Talking and discussing feelings with a psychologist, counsellor, psychiatrist or specialist practitioner.
- Medication.

It may be necessary to try different kinds of medication to see which works best for you. Before being given any medication, you have the right to be told what the drug is for and about any possible side effects.

Treatment is reviewed regularly and may be changed as you get better.

Pathways to recovery

- **Housing:** It's important for people recovering from mental illness to have support from people who are close to them, but it's not always possible – or appropriate – for them to live with their family or friends. If they're not able to live independently, the mental health teams work closely with housing authorities/ associations and can help with finding accommodation that will ensure they have all the support they need.

The care professional can help you access 'accommodation with support', which is available in every area.

- **Activities:** As recovery proceeds, you and your care co-ordinator may feel you could benefit from one or more activities. These activities may include leisure, exercise, clubhouses, training and employment. Some are within a sheltered environment but support can be provided to help you take up a wide range of activities available in the community. Some voluntary organisations and self-help groups also run drop-in centres that offer friendship and company to people recovering from mental illness.

Confidentiality

We keep a record of everyone who uses our services, some of it on computer. The factsheet 'Access to your records' explains how you can get access to your own files and sets out our policy on confidentiality.



Personalisation

Adult and Community Services are introducing a host of changes in the way we support people. We aim to put the customer first and maximise the choice and control people have over the services they receive. We will be working closely with the people who use our care services, their carers and our partners to make sure we get things right and make a real difference to people's lives.

Compliments and complaints

Adult and Community Services staff in Dorset are committed to providing quality services to our service users, their carers and families. We welcome comments from our service users as this helps us to understand what aspects of our service people like.

If you are unhappy about the service you have received and want to make a complaint, our factsheet 'How to complain' describes the procedure. Our Complaints Officer can give you advice on the process and can be contacted on 01305 224322.

Diversity statement

Diversity is not about treating everyone in the same way, but about recognising and valuing difference, as well as recognising and addressing inequalities and disadvantage.

As an employer and service provider, Dorset County Council seeks to promote an environment that accepts and actively supports diversity in age, gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability, culture, work style and the many other ways in which people differ from each other.

Further information on services provided by Dorset County Council Adult and Community Services can be accessed at www.dorsetforyou.com or by contacting the Adult Access Team on 01305 221016.

All our factsheets are available in large print and on audio cassette/CD, Braille, Easy to Read or alternative languages. Please contact the Information Office on 01305 224320.

