

Case Study

Delivering quality child and adolescent mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Professor Euan Hails, Consultant Nurse in Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

BACKGROUND

Euan Hails works at the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) as a Consultant Nurse in Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). He is also a Visiting Professor at the University of South Wales.

Euan works in a child and adolescent mental health services department, part of the Family and Therapies division at ABUHB. His department offers all services to young people under the age of 18 with mild to severe mental health problems.

The department has also been linked with other areas at ABUHB that offer services to people with more moderate problems like Primary Care.

CHALLENGES

The main issue Euan and his team faced was increased sickness in staff and the people they were attempting to work with. Additionally, they were faced with a lack of resources and, as the pandemic grew, there was a significant decrease in available beds for emergency CAMH services.

Alongside the noted challenges, Euan also highlights fatigue and exhaustion as being a major challenge the team faced due to their increased service hours.

"I think we've learned that: we don't have to all be in the office; we don't have to work between 9 to 5; we can consider and develop innovation quickly; we can support and adopt innovation quickly; we are able to understand the new digital platforms."

Euan Hails

AIMS

When the pandemic hit, Euan and his team quickly realised the impact the pandemic would likely have on the mental health of children and adolescents across the UK.

To help combat this impact, they quickly increased their services from a nine to five weekday model with a liaison emergency service on a Saturday and Sunday, to a 24/7 model. To help facilitate this change, they brought in all available staff, including members from their extended CAMH services from nursing, occupational therapy, etc.

Euan and his team also extended the helpline, which was initially used as a professional based helpline.

The team extended this line to 24 hours a day and opened it up to relatives, carers, parents, etc., of young people who were within their services so they could get immediate contact with clinicians if the need were to arise.



NEXT STEPS

Recently, Euan and the team had moved away from scheduling all staff on the 24/7 rotas and instead they are utilising the emergency services to assist in providing support. Their liaison services, crisis services, and intensive support and treatment services now offer extended hours and they have also focused some of their senior therapeutic staff onto an extended hours profile.

They have also provided their staff with the ability to return to the pre-COVID-19 model, should they wish to do so.

The team will continue with extended hours, perhaps not 24/7, as it has enabled them to offer therapeutic interventions at different times of the team and to an extent, it's lengthened the delivery day for many, opening additional support for those that really need it, whilst streamlining the services.

In the future, Euan's team and other CAMHS teams, as well as other NHS Wales colleagues, will be reviewing their most current services to develop an even closer relationship in order to share innovations and developments. Additional engagement is also being drawn with other NHS Wales colleagues such as senior nurses, to discuss innovations, knowledge and training sharing, as well as contingency measures.

OUTCOMES

The first achievement Euan highlighted was the glowing feedback his team received from parents, relatives, carers and even the Children's Commissioner for Wales who praised the innovative service on the Welsh news.

While the pandemic had negative effects on many, Euan also notes that it had a very positive effect on their service offering and allowed them to provide a much more focused and targeted service to the population that they were working with. In addition, the data accumulated and analysed during the past 15 months has now allowed them to streamline the 'on call' hours.

Additionally, he notes that they are now a much more cohesive CAMHS unit, and the pandemic has made it a lot easier for people to work together. The unit now regularly collaborates with their partners such as social services, educators, etc., and has increased their communication with school health nurses and health visitors which has helped to expand their service offering and reach a slightly different target population, with a more flexible consumption model.

When it comes to offering physical psychological therapies, Euan notes that the overarching model is still one-to-one appointments. However, during the pandemic, the team rolled out the NHS's Attend Anywhere platform across their service so they could offer new assessments and complete ongoing work and psychological work online while adhering to COVID-19 guidance.

Euan notes that this platform has had a great impact on saving funds and has been very positively received by patients and their families.

"In a way, [the pandemic] has broadened our understanding of what we can deliver as a mental health service, because most CAMH services will be face-to-face, one to one, unless you're delivering a group and that that will be obviously in situ."

"We've now realised that we can deliver quite a lot of our service, which doesn't come at the detriment of the core service that we're delivering, either digitally or remotely or . . . using other formats."

Euan Hails