Developing an inequalities strategy for mental health in East Glasgow

Introduction

Poor mental health is strongly associated with social factors such as poverty and discrimination and East Glasgow is known to have high levels of poor mental health and high levels of deprivation (GCPH, 2008). Health services are thought to have a crucial but underdeveloped role in addressing social determinants of health (WHO, 2008) and East Glasgow CHCP has demonstrated a willingness to explore what their role might be in addressing inequalities. This paper introduces an outline for a project that aims to address inequalities in mental health by strengthening the response of services and projects in East Glasgow to the high levels of poor mental health related to social factors. The proposal focuses initially on mental health services in the CHCP but intends to develop processes that can be transferable to other agencies in the area with an interest in tackling social inequalities in mental health, such as Community Planning or Glasgow East Regeneration Agency.

Tackling Social Inequalities in East Glasgow

The project would take as its starting point an inequalities strategy for children's services, which is currently in development in East Glasgow CHCP. The strategy builds on work carried out by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health using a framework for policy action on social determinants of health created by Whitehead and Dahlgren (2006). Following on from this work a group of managers and practitioners from East Glasgow CHCP Children's Services discussed the main factors that would need to change for children in East Glasgow to improve their opportunities and their health. The group agreed that the two main issues were poverty and educational attainment. The next step, currently underway, will be to identify the actions that individual services and service providers can take to contribute to reducing child poverty and improving educational attainment. From this, evidence-based principles and recommendations for practice will be identified and proposed to the East Glasgow children's services strategy group as the basis for an inequalities strategy.

Project proposal for tackling mental health inequalities

We believe that a similar process could be applied to mental health services in order to agree and strengthen their role in addressing inequalities in mental health. As the topics are likely to be different than those identified for children's services, we would propose to begin the process by asking the following question:

What needs to happen in East Glasgow to help people cope with the effects of social inequalities on their mental health AND to address these social inequalities?

We would then go on to explore the roles that mental health services currently play to address social inequalities in mental health in relation to the answers to the above question. The next stage would then be to explore the principles and practice that can be further developed within East Glasgow's mental health services in order to strengthen their contribution to reducing inequalities in mental health.

The project would also potentially contribute to other work on inequalities. First, together with the work on children's services, some general principles could be drawn out to contribute to the overall CHCP approach to addressing inequalities. Second, the work would link with and contribute to existing work with the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health on social inclusion and mainstreaming of mental health across council services. Finally, the feasibility of extending the work to Community Planning, Glasgow East Regeneration Agency and to relevant voluntary and community organisations would be explored through Positive Mental Attitude's newly established mental health improvement and inequalities network in East Glasgow.

Proposed process

We propose the following steps to progress the proposal:

1. Meet with Raymond Bell for comments and ideas on the proposal
2. If agreed, identify a small number of key, senior staff within East Glasgow mental health services (with advice from RB) to work with us to begin to explore the question as outlined above
3. Identify a wider group of service personnel to discuss the role and potential role of mental health services in addressing social inequalities in mental health.

From here, the work would continue in close collaboration with key mental health service personnel to agree priorities and refine the strategy.

Timescale

The starting point would depend on engaging with key staff. We envisage that steps 1-3 above could be complete within six months and a draft strategy produced within one year.

References

GCPH, 2008. *East Glasgow Community Profile*. Glasgow Centre for Population Health

World Health Organisation, 2008. *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. WHO Geneva

Whitehead M and Dahlgren G 2006 Levelling up (part 1): *A discussion paper on concepts and principles for tackling social inequities in health.* WHO Europe

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