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## CHANGING PSYCHIATRISTS

### MEETING OF THE HUG THURSDAY THINK IN.

#### INTRODUCTION

In February 2014 HUG was approached by VOX to find out our opinion on the ease and difficulties we experience when wanting to change psychiatrist.

We used our Thursday think in on 20 february to discuss this subject. Eleven people were involved in the discussion. The results of which are detailed below:

#### **Should we be able to change psychiatrist?**

We all felt that we should be able to change our psychiatrist. The quality of our relationship and the skill they offer are critical to our care and treatment, if we are unhappy with this then we should be able to change the person who is offering us help.

#### **Is it easy to change psychiatrist?**

Most of us think that it is hard to change psychiatrist if we want to and that we face obstacles if we try:

- *"When I was in hospital it was almost impossible – they let you change assistants but you still have the same consultant"*
- *"My friend wanted to change psychiatrist but they wouldn't let him, he had to resort to very rude behaviour towards his psychiatrist in order to achieve a change."*
- *"I changed one; I got on fine with 'Dr x' but then was changed to 'Dr b' but I didn't agree with him. I asked for a another opinion and all hell was let loose; he didn't agree with me asking for another opinion or with what I was doing . It was a long struggle to get a new psychiatrist – it was very stressful."*
- *"My last one referred me to a new one, but after a time I was referred to group therapy by that one – I cannot deal with groups but I have been*

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*told this is all I can have; so I go along very reluctantly, I feel I have no say”.*

- *“You need to put it in writing that you want a new one – I’ve tried it and have been told I can see someone on the same team or another Dr who I do not get on with at all. It feels like I have no choice over who I see.”*

We feel that, what may seem to be trivial reasons for wanting to change psychiatrist, are not understood properly and that a collection of small issues may result in a completely unproductive relationship. We feel our concerns, even when seen as minor should be respected.

Some of us do not want a psychiatrist at all:

*“It took me a year – I refused to see a psychiatrist because I didn’t like him. Then I got a new psychiatrist; I felt the old one was abusive. I managed to get away. I don’t feel I need one – unless there is a reason, I will no longer see one. I suppose the older people’s one is a bit better now I have been assigned them.”*

### **How to change psychiatrist:**

Many of us are unsure about how to change psychiatrist and assume that it will be difficult to do so and that we may not be welcomed for doing so. Some of us did not know that we could change psychiatrist.

### **Why is it important to be able to change psychiatrist?**

We think that it is important that we are able to change psychiatrist and that in this area of health the quality of the relationship we have with them is extremely important.

We have a great need to respect, trust and feel safe with psychiatrists in order for treatment to be insightful and appropriate.

### **Is it ever good not to change psychiatrist?**

We are aware that some of us feel that a relationship with a psychiatrist can become a long term one where attitudes and opinions and treatment become set. This may lead to less than desirable practice. Changing psychiatrist may pick up on this and lead to improved treatment.

However the thought of changing psychiatrists when we know them well is not something some of us relish.

It may take many years for them to get to know us and understand us and know what works and doesn’t work with us. In these circumstances a change in psychiatrist could be unhelpful.

We are aware that some of us reject all aspects of psychiatry and our psychiatrists in particular but that we may be so ill that some form of contact with services is essential. In these circumstances it is vital that additional effort is made to repair or enhance what is inevitably a damaged relationship.

### **Some reasons for wanting a particular psychiatrist**

Some of us feel that there may be cultural, gender or other reasons for wanting a particular psychiatrist, for instance some women may want same sex helpers when dealing with gender based issues and some men feel less threatened when speaking of apparent weakness with women rather than men.

Equally some people confronted by certain cultural values towards family norms may resist the help of some people from some cultures.

We worry though, that having choice of psychiatrist on the basis of gender, culture or other background may be a way of allowing prejudice in these areas and may, in effect, condone racism or sexism.

Ideally having choice of psychiatrist should be based on them as people not as any assumed stereotype.

### **Complaining about psychiatrists**

We also worry that it is hard to raise complaints about psychiatrists that will be taken seriously and that some poor practice is allowed to continue because there is a lack of evidence and of will to address it.

### **Second opinions**

We feel that it should be easy to ask for a second opinion but some of us feel that fellow professionals are more likely to support each other.

### **Stopping the need to change psychiatrist**

We feel that we need to help psychiatrists understand more about the need for an acceptable set of values and attitudes towards us and feel that an exercise that Hug carried out recently in this area, was received well.

However we are also aware that a psychiatrist who seems ideal for one person is not so for another person, rather than trying to match each patient with a psychiatrist who they can develop a trusting relationship with we feel that there should be a baseline level of communication and relationship skills for every psychiatrist to attain.

On the other hand communication and relationship are not all that is needed in psychiatry – the skills and knowledge that they have in dealing with mental illness are perhaps more or equally important.

Some of us may wish to have a particular psychiatrist because they have an expertise in certain areas of mental health. We may wish to be able to benefit from this.

### **Practicalities**

We are aware that in a rural area like Highland there may be genuine difficulties in changing psychiatrist as having more psychiatrists to choose from is unlikely, using IT and such things as video conferencing may be a solution but may be far from ideal.

### **FINAL WORDS**

- *"My psychiatrist who I have not known very long is very good – he is Asian and 'different' – it feels like a connecting point. The fact that we are both different creates a connection and empathy. His sense of 'outsidership' and mine helps. We need to stop labelling and create connections with different people and cultures."*
- *"It helps if you have a psychiatrist that believes in you. When you have random doctors you lose expertise and understanding. When you get someone who understands you and who you can trust and can therefore show yourself to. When they have an interest in you and see you as a person. Who you develop a relationship with. Then this is good."*
- *"I have had wonderful psychiatrists all through my adult life."*
- *"We have incredible services here."*