

Title: GP attitudes towards screening and treating mental and substance use disorders in primary care.

Authors: D Leahy, J Saunders, D Swan, D Meagher, F McNicholas, P Ryan & W Cullen

Introduction: GPs have a crucial role in the identification and management of young people with mental and substance use disorders, including facilitating more timely intervention. As part of a programme to inform how primary care might better address youth mental health, this paper aims to determine current screening practices and explore GP attitudes in regards to potential interventions that facilitate the identification and treatment of mental and substance use disorders in young adults.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey of a national random sample of GPs (n=363) involving a study instrument informed by a narrative literature review and qualitative interviews with healthcare professionals and young people. All statistical analysis was performed using SPSS.

Results: We received 183 responses (50% response rate). While 133 (73%) of GPs reported their postgraduate training had adequately prepared them to deal with adult mental health problems, 29 (16%) and 37 (21%) indicated this was the case for child and adolescent mental health and substance use. Screening practices were significantly associated with gender, practice type and training satisfaction. Key barriers to treatment included: the attitude of patients / families, lack of specialist staff in the practice, poor service availability and lack of time. Access to services (66%), definitions of which interventions can be initiated in primary care (44%), appropriate time and space (47%) and access to a youth worker (42%) were the interventions most commonly identified to facilitate screening and treatment of mental and substance use disorders in general practice.

Conclusions: General practice is central to early intervention for youth mental health. Promoting awareness of mental health and the role of the GP in helping these issues, educating practitioners that includes specific training in youth mental and substance use disorders and improving access to psychological treatments are likely to be the key domains of such an intervention.