

British Medical Association
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PE1438/I

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David Stewart MSP
Convener
Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament

Scotland National Office

7 February 2013

Dear Mr Stewart

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1438

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide improved mental health services for those people in hospital and that have been discharged after having a mental health problem, and to actively stop the stigma of mental ill-health to ensure that people with mental health problems do not feel ashamed of their feelings.

Thank you for inviting BMA Scotland to make a submission in relation to Petition PE1438. The BMA does not have any specific policy on the areas covered by the petition, however, I have consulted with a number of our GP members and we would like to make the following comments:

Psychiatry continues to be the 'Cinderella specialty' when it comes to funding. Mental health care has changed significantly in recent years, with more treatment in the community and a greater focus on helping people to recover from mental health problems. However, there are long waits to access certain services, particularly those for adolescents, and there is a lack of out-of-hours and crisis services in some areas.

If patient care is to continue to be enhanced then resources are required to properly fund services (both hospital and community based) and facilitate more integrated working. Our members report that low funding levels result in delays in accessing psychiatric services. Other adverse impacts include insufficient clinical or nursing staff, lack of beds, and delays in implementing patients' care.

Investment should be targeted at areas of greatest need. People living in areas of deprivation are more likely to suffer from a mental illness and suicide rates are significantly higher for this group. Addressing mental health must be a key part of the strategy to address the health inequality gap that exists in Scotland.

Thanks to the work of organisations such as 'See Me' and SAMH, the stigma associated with mental health is gradually being removed, but very slowly.

Scottish Secretary: Martin Woodrow
Chief Executive/Secretary: Tony Bourne

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On the specific point regarding guidelines available to GPs, the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the GP contract includes mental health points and GPs receive extensive advice on directing patients to community primary care and community mental health teams as well as third sector services such as "stepping stones" or alcoholics anonymous and counselling services. There are also SIGN and NICE guidelines available.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Reilly
BMA Scotland Public Affairs Officer