

Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010

NDCS Cymru response



May 2010

1. About Us

1.1. The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We represent the interests of and campaign for the rights of all deaf children and young people from birth until they reach independence.

1.2. By deaf, we mean anyone with a permanent or temporary hearing loss. This could be a mild, moderate, severe or profound hearing loss. The term deaf does not presuppose the use of any one communication method and could refer to children who communicate orally or through sign language. We also include children who have a hearing loss in one ear.

2. Background

2.1. Deaf children and young people are 60% more likely to experience mental health problems than other children.¹ With the appropriate support, deaf children can grow up to be confident and resilient individuals. However, growing up deaf in a hearing world and the communication barriers that result, can pose challenges to the emotional well-being of many deaf children.

2.2. In particular, NDCS Cymru would highlight the following points:

- Communication barriers can leave deaf children and young people feeling isolated from family and friends.
- The perceived inability of deaf children to communicate can make them a target for abuse and bullying.
- Professionals may fail to identify signs of mental health problems in deaf children because of communication barriers.

2.3. In 2008, NDCS Cymru submitted a joint paper with RNID Cymru, Deafblind Cymru, and Mind Cymru, *Specialist mental health services in Wales: The forgotten patients*. This paper highlighted that, unlike England, there are no specialist deaf mental health services in Wales. NDCS Cymru is now pleased to be involved in ongoing work with the Welsh Assembly Government, mental health professionals, and other deaf organisations to identify a clear referral pathway for deaf children and young people to access specialist deaf CAMHS.

2.4. NDCS Cymru believes it is also vital that mainstream and primary support services are accessible to the young deaf population. NDCS Cymru is therefore pleased to have recently worked with the Welsh Assembly Government to develop additional guidance for the

¹ Department of Health, 2005, *Mental Health and Deafness: Towards Equity and Access*

School-based Counselling Operating Toolkit, encouraging school counsellors to ensure that their services are accessible to deaf children and young people.

Response

3.1. Although NDCS Cymru is pleased to have worked with the Welsh Assembly Government in the developments outlined above, we are disappointed that the proposed Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010 is largely inapplicable to children and young people.

3.2. NDCS Cymru believes that the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to improving mental health services should be holistic. We would wish for improvements in mental health services to benefit the entire population of Wales, taking into account the specific needs of disability and vulnerable groups. Given the increased vulnerability of mental health problems within the deaf population, NDCS Cymru believes that particular efforts are required to ensure that support services are "deaf friendly". In this respect, NDCS Cymru would not only urge that consideration is given to extend the measure to cover under 18s, but that consideration is also given to the following points:

- The need for all staff involved in providing mental health support to receive deaf awareness training and to have an understanding of how to meet the varying communication needs of the deaf population. All staff should also have an awareness of the increased vulnerability of deaf children and young people.
- The need for mental health support services to be accessible by textphone and email.
- The need for mental health support services to have a loop system in place.
- The need for all staff within mental health support services to be aware of protocols for booking appropriate sign language interpreters. Given the sensitive and confidential nature of the service, such protocols should highlight the importance of ensuring that patients are content with the booked interpreter.
- NDCS Cymru would like to highlight that written information may not always be accessible to deaf people who are first-language BSL users. In such cases, it is necessary to ensure that information is interpreted for the service user in the appropriate format.
- It is important that all professionals are well-informed of specialist services, including the anticipated referral pathway for specialist deaf CAMHS. Primary mental health service practitioners should be equipped with basic deaf awareness, but should have an awareness of when it may be appropriate to refer a deaf patient on to specialist deaf mental health services.

3.3. NDCS Cymru notes that part 4 of the proposed measure is applicable to in-patients of all ages. NDCS Cymru seeks assurance that such services will be equipped to deliver a service which is age-appropriate and takes account of the patient's cognitive ability. Furthermore, NDCS Cymru believes that IMHA workers should also be deaf aware and have an understanding of how to meet the varying communication needs of deaf patients.