**Parent Focus Group3**

**Date: 11 March 2022**

**Participants: 9 females**

**Duration: 0:55:00**

**Participants requested for the session not to be recorded so notes were taken 11/05/2022**

All participants had mental health problems apart from one woman who was the mother and carer for her adult daughter who had a history of psychosis since age of 15. Much of the conversation was around mental health services; some consideration of GP/primary care and dental care.

**Appointments**

Most issues raised were with availability of appointments. Digital poverty was an issue here too – noted by some women that the easiest (only?) way to get a GP appointment is via an app, but one woman noted that she did not have a smart phone or access to a computer and relied on phoning her surgery or hospital.

“*can’t pick up the phone and ring someone – there’s no one there*”

Almost everyone had experienced difficulty in accessing services. This was due to availability – not scheduling/timing of appointments, apart from one mother of 4 who noted that she had requested a change to an appointment time so that it was during school term time (so she could attend with only the child who was being seen rather than having to take all 4 children).

Women reported difficulty getting appointments both in primary care and referrals to secondary care – and very long waiting times for follow-up appointments.

Specific issues raised about access to NHS dentists – women reported routinely waiting 12-18 months for appointments for their children, during which time oral health deteriorates and children are in pain. Also one woman reported struggling to find an optician for her son.

**Specific lack of mental health support**

All participants in this group had experience of needing mental health support, either for themselves of their family members (or both).

Evidence of services being stretched. One asylum seeker suffering trauma and depression has not had a mental health referral – being managed (with medication) by her GP. Her 15 year old daughter, who the GP had referred for mental health support, is waiting for an appointment.

Another women summed it up as “*everything seems to be disintegrating. They can’t blame it all on COVID*”

Several women spoke about the lack of involvement of themselves in decisions about their care – one described her GP as a “*tablet doctor*” who “*pushes medication on you*”. Another said “[they] *don’t want you involved in your treatment….want to tell you what the treatment is*”. Although in contrast (this was more in relation to physical health) one woman said “*they want me to tell them what’s wrong with me. I’m doing their job for them*”.

It was clear that a great deal of provision that was really valued by these women was provided by charities and third sector organisations (including SVP). One woman’s husband is being supported to help her by a social worker through a charity based in Cambridge.

**Continuity of care**

Not receiving carer consistently from the same healthcare professional and having to keep “*explaining yourself over and over*” was an issue. There was discussion around preference for having a named GP, rather than taking an appointment with whoever was available. “*want to build up a relationship with your doctor not just see anyone in the practice”*

One woman complained that a course of CBT she had been given was fragmented. Offered a 6 week course but in fact received 6 sessions over a period of several months due to staff availability, Christmas holidays etc. Felt this was disruptive and reduced the value of the CBT.

**Lack of information and consistency in availability of services**

Lots of comments about only finding out about services (both clinical/support services and financial help that might be available, for example to cover the cost of transport to get to a healthcare facility) by chance. The social worker providing support through the Cambridge charity, for example, was found by chance as a result of dialling a wrong number.

**Negative comments about mental health services/NHS:**

One woman was refused CBT when she requested it and told “*your family should support you*”; she said “*my husband has had to carry me*” and reported that when she tried to contact the suicide prevention service in crisis they refused to take her call because she was calling from a withheld number.

Carer of daughter who has psychotic episodes: “*mental health services appalling”; “crisis team were rubbish”* and said the only support she got was “*just a shiny leaflet”*

Woman who had self-harmed since early teens “*GP/therapist was unsatisfactory”;* after a period of no contact with them (her decision) she requested support (during pandemic) and was directed to a website to read “*pages and pages of information”* (has dyslexia).

**Positive comments**

“*wonderful GP”*

*“some wonderful people work in the NHS”*

*“Good experience of GP when I get there – but waiting times a problem”*

Attending VCSE organisation *“is life changing”*