

Inside Out

Experiences of healthcare following
release from prison

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Background

In Lancashire there are currently five prisons:

- HMP Preston – category B
- HMP Garth - category B
- HMP Lancaster Farms – category C
- HMP Wymott - category C
- HMP Kirkham - category D (see note below)

All Lancashire prisons are for males over the age of eighteen, with HMP Styal in Cheshire being the closest women's prison.

Through events attended with Red Rose Recovery it was raised that some people's experiences of healthcare services within Lancashire prisons had been generally poor; therefore a project was proposed to gain an insight into the issues which could be fed back to prison healthcare providers and help work towards service improvement.

Following meetings with various third sector organisations who work directly with people in prison it was determined that the project had merit. However following a meeting with ABL (A Better Life), who are independent advocates for healthcare in prisons, it was determined that visiting people in prison to discuss their healthcare is already being carried out and that the project needed to adapt to prevent duplication.

The Proposal

Healthwatch Lancashire set out to investigate the continuation of healthcare for those leaving the prison system and identify key issues people are facing when returning home or relocating following release.

Project objectives:

- Identify any key areas needing improvement in line with feedback from those using the services and to share this information with relevant healthcare providers
- Support the forming/developing of open, transparent lines of communication between prison and external healthcare providers to provide a more seamless transition from inside to outside health services
- To allow for those using the services to have their voices heard
- To be able to share good practice

Note: Categories define the level of security with 'A' being maximum security and 'D' being an open prison/rehabilitation centre

Methodology

In order to gather as much feedback as possible an online survey was created. Posters and leaflets with QR codes to the online survey were created and distributed through various methods including sharing with Integrated Care Communities (ICCs), Pendle YES Hub and Heathier Fleetwood, as well as displaying at engagement events and placing in local settings such as libraries.

Contact was made with over fifteen third sector organisations who support people formerly in prison, and meetings were held to discuss the project in order to be able to gather feedback.

Following this engagement with community groups and organisations we received feedback from three people about their experiences of healthcare when leaving prison. It was initially expected that we would hear from more people, however due to the nature of the topic there was a limited response, this may be due to several factors and further investigation would be needed to determine why the response rate was low.

Findings

Initial discussions with third sector organisations, people they support and a prison veterans group identified barriers to accessing mental health support when leaving prison. Prison mental health support was deemed overall to be good, although sentencing following remand, moving prisons, and leaving prison were seen as times when people would 'go to the back of the queue'.

General feedback over the course of this project also highlighted the need for a quicker sharing of medical records between GPs and prisons, as well as between prisons during transfers, sentencing etc in order for medications and mental health support to be put in place in a timely manner. Access to medication was also raised, especially for those who faced homelessness when leaving prison.

“Just be able to get the right medication given to you and registered somewhere where we can go and get more medication when we run out”

“I was not given the right medication on leaving prison... I lived in a tent in the streets around not very nice people I had to hide my medication from other people. I felt scared and uncared for”

Three online surveys were completed and the findings are as below:

All three respondents had been in prison in other parts of the country and have returned to Lancashire since leaving prison. One respondent had been released within three months of completing the survey and two preferred not to say.

All three respondents stated that they had accessed a prison doctor, and two stated that they had accessed prison mental health services. Two of the respondents had also attended hospital and seen a consultant/doctor during their time in prison. At the

time of completing the survey one respondent was registered with a consultant, one with mental health services, and all three were registered with a GP.

The need for more guidance on registering with healthcare practices was raised by one respondent *“Better information about what to do when they are released. All they are given is a leaflet or phone number. There needs to be something that tells them what they need to make sure they do when they leave the system”*.

Two of the people who completed the survey spoke about the support they received on leaving prison from third sector organisations, and how this made the transition easier. All three felt that there had been judgements made by community medical professionals and that there was a lack of understanding of their needs/situation.

“I think staff need to be more understanding and sensitive to the needs of people with different problems. I found a lot of judgement came my way when I told people about my past which does put me off using services”

“The issue is that they aren’t given any respect by professionals. They are people at the end of the day”

Conclusion

In order to fully understand the experience of returning to community healthcare after leaving prison there is a need to gather more evidence and hear more experiences. However, the feedback we have gathered indicates there are improvements needed to ensure that individuals have a good quality of care that is without judgement or prejudice.

Available support

Release Mates (Preston) - www.releasemates.org Tel: 07399 082994

“To provide prison leavers with the best possible start in the immediate hours after release”

Inspire Motivate Overcome (IMO) www.imocharity.org Tel: 01254 781310

“To work with and enable communities to improve their quality of life and be more resilient”

Red Rose Recovery – www.redroserecovery.org.uk Tel: 01772 821440

“Developing recovery systems and creating opportunities for people affected by substance misuse, mental health and offending behaviours”

Recycling Lives – www.recyclinglives.org

“We support men and women in prisons across the UK to reduce reoffending rates. By engaging them in meaningful work we help offenders to develop skills, confidence and resilience ready to secure a good job and stable housing on release”

Veterans HQ – www.veteranshq.org.uk Tel: 0151 261 9878

“Helping ex-armed forces personnel, reservists, and their families”

Please note that there are other services available dependent on needs and preferences.

Recommendations

- 1) Look at how medical records can be shared more effectively between prison healthcare providers and GPs to ensure that access to necessary medication is not delayed
- 2) Work on reducing stigma and judgement in community health services, include those with lived experience to identify how this could be achieved
- 3) Look at improving communication with those being released in order for them to be more fully aware on how to register with a GP, dentist etc.