

'Parity of esteem'

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What is Parity of Esteem ?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines:

- Parity as: ‘the state or condition of being equal, or on a level; equality’.
- Esteem as ‘to attach value (subjectively) to; to think highly of; to feel regard for, respect’.

What does it mean to NHS England?

- “My family and I all have access to services which enable us to maintain both our mental and physical wellbeing.”
- “If I become unwell I use services which assess and treat mental health disorders or conditions on a par with physical health illnesses.”

What does it mean to others?

US law

- In 2006 mandated that mental health should not be excluded from health insurance coverage

Royal College of Psychiatrists

- Whole-person care
- Valuing mental health equally with physical health

What does it mean in practice?

Parity between mental and physical

- Health care resources
- Status of practitioners
- Patient experience of care
- Understanding and stigma

1. Parity of resource

Better funding for Mental Health Trusts

But does parity also imply funding for primary and acute care which arguably see the most MH patients

2. Parity of status

MH Practitioners as valued as physicians or surgeons

But does that also mean equivalent training, similar working conditions and equal scrutiny of outcomes

3. Parity of care

Better care for patients using MH services.

But does that also mean better MH care for medical patients and better physical care for MH patients.

4. Parity of meaning

Equal acceptance of and no stigma for mental illness

But does that require agreement on what is mental illness what we do and even what to call the sick person? And how will that affect stigma?

Visions of parity

Parity between mental and physical

- Health care resources
- Status of practitioners
- Patient experience of care
- Understanding and stigma

Whole person care

One vision: OUH Psychological Medicine

- 2013: Acute Trust appointments of consultant psychiatrists in medicine & geratology teams
- 2014: Combine psychiatry and psychology in the Trust to form Psychological Medicine
- 2015: Appointments to key clinical teams: Children's, Women's, Cancer, Neuroscience, Renal & transplant

Has it worked?

- Successes
 - Provision of skilled staff – 10 psych. and 20 psychol.
 - Well accepted – Trust ‘Gold team of the year’
 - Patient centred integrated care – most areas
 - Shared language and less stigma – a single record
- Challenges
 - Internal resources – not enough
 - External responses – a challenge to the status quo

Other visions

Examples:

- Enhanced primary care
- Integrated community services

Challenges:

- Not Just about resources
- Co-location is not integration

Is it really parity we want?

"Parity of esteem" is a phrase used in political philosophy for a theory of how to overcome inter-communal conflict.

The theory is that "*parity of esteem*" "offers a language for negotiation of a post-conflict equilibrium."

Rather than continue trying to out-do each other, the communities should attempt to negotiate a peaceful coexistence despite their cultural differences.

Beyond parity

Parity of esteem can conjure up a combative image of mental and physical health as being in competition with one another

While the prospect of more funding for mental health services is a good thing, it's no real victory **if mental and physical services are not brought into unison.**

Edward Pinkney (2014)

Summary

- Parity of esteem has been a useful lever for resources
- Its implications are also very challenging
- We have positive examples of parity in practice
- Is parity really only a transitional concept on the route to full integration of mental and physical care?

Thank you



References

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