

What the PCT cutbacks would mean in practice

(from the UNISON SLaM Branch newspaper)

In both Lambeth and Southwark the pattern is the same: the cutbacks will undermine high quality and effective services, including rehabilitation and the community services which have succeeded in speeding discharges, keeping many patients out of hospital, and reducing the use of costly and less effective private sector beds.

The mergers of community teams and reduction in staff numbers will increase the caseload and increase the pressure on remaining staff, especially in covering for sickness and holidays – restricting patient access to specialist care, and raising issues of safety for patients and staff.

Lambeth's Home Treatment Teams have been preventing hospital admissions by giving intensive support to patients who are deemed ill enough to require a hospital bed, visiting them once or more each day. The cuts in staffing will reduce their work to assessment and administering pills: there will be no time left for additional qualitative support.

Cutbacks in services for patients with a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse run alongside reduced support for services to combat addictions – despite the fact that in Lambeth 80-90 percent of psychiatric patients have a concurrent problem with substance abuse.

These reductions may therefore bring short term savings but lead to higher costs in the long term as more patients will be denied the support to live independently in the community, and require hospital treatment on already hard-pressed acute wards.

To make matters worse, cuts in beds and services for children and adolescents, older adults, learning disabilities and the closure of the brand new Dove House in-patient unit for women will all have a negative impact on especially vulnerable patients – with no alternative services available.

Many of the services now being cut back are the result of years of collaborative work to develop effective, relatively low-cost, high quality care.

The Lambeth system that is now being undermined has been built up, expanded and reorganised over recent years; yet we know that the current round of cuts in Lambeth is to be followed by further cutbacks next year.

Staff morale will be knocked back across the Trust as the two PCTs demonstrate once again that mental health is seen as a soft target for cuts, relegated to “Cinderella” status: in addition the requirement for Trust-wide “efficiency savings” will ensure that every unit and workplace feels the pinch, and many of the cuts will have knock-on impact.