

▶ Culture and information sharing in mental health crisis care

**Sharing information to manage risk**



# Summary

The Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing has supported Surrey to explore the cultural factors impacting on information sharing for the various stakeholders working in mental health crisis care.

Through this work seven key themes have been identified around culture and information sharing:

1. Scaling up successful information sharing
2. Working in a complex partnership setting
3. Supporting assessment of risk for people in crisis and for organisations
4. Supporting out of hours working and people in crisis
5. Working together to identify and support people with complex needs
6. Monitoring and tracking outcomes for service user and supporting commissioning
7. Building the mind-set, capacity and willingness to share information

**The report has been split in to the seven themes which are available from [www.informationsharing.org.uk/hsc](http://www.informationsharing.org.uk/hsc)**



### **3. Sharing information to help assess and manage risks for people in crisis and organisations**

#### **Issues covered:**

**Leadership. Empowering sharing, perceptions, staff safety, patient safety, professional understanding and trust, language**

Local places know that through information sharing they will be able to develop a full picture of the people they are seeking to help and will also provide improved intelligence of a person's situation. All of this will ensure that different professionals are consistent in their assessments of the needs and risks of people in or at risk of entering mental health crisis. Local places also see information sharing as supporting those professionals who will be, or are actually already, operating at the points of delivery for new mental health crisis services and or at other points in the crisis care system that people may approach when seeking help for themselves or others. This sharing of information will enable professionals to make well informed, robust and timely decisions that effectively identify, assess and manage the risks to service user and others around them.

#### **Learning and challenges**

Information sharing in a local place will always be impacted on by the level of confidence and trust between organisations, agencies and individual professionals. In particular, the level of concern held by organisations and individuals around how safely mental health information is being shared, how securely it is being held and also the degree to which it is being used appropriately will determine the level of trust and thus ease of flow of information around the mental health crisis care system.

Inconsistent approaches to recording core information and the language used will result in information being missed, misunderstood or misinterpreted, resulting in an inability to reap the full potential of using it to assess and support people. Concerns about the accuracy and robustness of information that others are collecting and sharing at referral or hand-off between agencies will damage trust. The knock on effect of this is that different professionals will duplicate information collection, meaning that people accessing support having to tell their story time after time, at each stage and by each organisation they come in to contact with.

Ultimately, a local place's mental health crisis care system will leave itself open to information incidents, service user challenge and punitive action from information regulators, like the Information Commissioners Office, if it does not put in place appropriate measures to ensure it is managing information sharing activity appropriately.

Local places have seen that understanding, confidence and trust truly develops with the closer working of professionals through operational arrangements like co-location, joint-working and through integrated multi-agency training that contains elements of, or even specifically focuses on, information sharing.

Also the development of shared health or care records and common information sharing language is key to enabling professionals to understand each other, work together and share information better.

**Police and Mental Health Co-locate:** The Surrey Mental Health & Police Contact Centre Pilot has co-located a mental health professional alongside Police call handlers in Surrey Police's own contact centre. Through the mental health professional being able to access an individual's electronic mental health records they can provide support, advice and guidance to Police officers when they are responding to mental health incidents. The Director of Adult Mental Health Services highlighted the fact that it should not be underestimated the amount of time that was required to consider and work through information sharing issues and also prepare professionals to ensure they were confident to share information when the project went live.

**Understanding Risk:** Through interviews with the various mental health crisis care system partners in Surrey different organisations highlighted various concerns about the risks and unintended adverse impacts of information sharing. One was the risks resulting from service users perceptions of information sharing, who is sharing it and how it is used. One partner illustrated this by describing a potential situation where a drug user or someone connected to or involved in criminal activity may believe agencies are sharing information with the Police and so decide to disengage from services. This would become more serious if they decide not to contact emergency services during a life threatening situation in the fear that they will invite unwanted Police attention. This could mean that a heroin overdose results in a fatality. Another situation was that a service user may believe information sharing means that a support service is colluding with the Police. This may mean that the personal safety of professionals who work with fragile or unstable service users in high risk situations, such as service users own homes, is put at risk.

**Building Professional Understanding:** The Aldershot Safe Haven is a community based resource staffed by voluntary and statutory health professionals that provides a safe physical space and an alternative to Accident and Emergency for people at risk of or in mental health crisis. The Service Manager pin pointed the key factors of the co-location of professionals from different sectors, joint working by those professionals on assessment and care, and also the provision of multi-agency mental health training as enabling professionals to develop their understanding of each other's roles and so build the confidence and put in place the trust that supports effective information sharing.