

SURVEY OF NEWRY & MOURNE PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH CARE REFERRAL SYSTEM

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Aims: This study was aimed at evaluating the effect of the new, centralised (regional) referral system on the local Primary Mental Health Care (PMHC) Service, two years after inception.

Background: Prior to the Single Point of Entry (SPOE) system, which is also known as triage, referrals were sent directly to each Consultant Psychiatrist and Community Mental Health Team by General practitioners (GPs). Theoretically, the new referral system should streamline referrals using resources efficiently, make access to mental health easier and reduce the time patients wait to be seen after referral.

Method: Via user-satisfaction questionnaires, we conducted an on-line survey of GPs and the PMHC team in the Newry and Mourne area over a period of three months, asking for their views on the SPOE system.

Results: The response rate for GPs was 28.3% (17), and 68.4% (13) for PMHC team. 65% of GPs and 85% of the PMHC team felt the new referral system was moderately or very effective overall. Both groups agreed that the time patients wait to be seen after routine referrals should be shortened. Emerging themes from qualitative analysis include the need to improve communication, training of staff and access to patient records during triage.

Conclusions: The low GP response rate suggests that Mental Health services should obtain more effective ways of engaging GPs in service development. This study indicates that the single point of entry system is effective overall but needs improvement in terms of accessibility and adequate communication between GPs, PMHC team and triage staff.