

Patient Participation Group, Lonsdale Medical Centre.
Public Meeting held on March 13th 2014.

The meeting took place at the Christian Fellowship Centre, on Hanover Road from 7.15-9.15pm. The topic was "Minding Mental Health". The speakers were John Neel from Crossways, Natasha Mikula from the Primary Care Psychological Services and Penny Lawne, accompanied by Geoff ?, from the Samaritans. The meeting was chaired by the PPG Chair, Graham Richards. There was an audience, discounting the speakers of 22.

John Neel, Crossways: John gave a most interesting talk on the Crossways community. It is a Christian charity and started in Croydon. Now they are based in Tunbridge Wells and run three residential schemes, a care home for people with more acute mental health difficulties, a hostel that provides help where it is needed and six self-contained flats for people moving towards independent living.

John gave a most illuminating talk and explained how, when we become more aware of what mental health means, then we can deal with those who suffer, with much more understanding. He explained that Stress is a feature of modern life and it can be a good thing, but if it builds up, then the person can have many physical symptoms, which may prevent that person, being able to deal with normal life, such as caring for a family, or going to work. There are other serious conditions which may require longer term aid, from medical professionals, for example Schizophrenia.

Crossways' mission is to reach out to the community and spread awareness about mental health.

Natasha Mikula, Primary Care Psychological Therapies Service. Natasha confirmed what John had said, that there is an increased awareness of mental health issues, although some stigma still exists. She stressed that anyone can suffer from a degree of mental health, manifesting itself in Depression, Anxiety Disorder, Phobias, Panic disorder, extreme reactions to health difficulties, emotional break ups and bereavement.

Your first port of call should be your GP, who will help you to complete the necessary forms, to be sent to the PCPTS. Dr Capone mentioned the length of time, that is needed to deal with patients who are extremely distressed in the surgery and suggested that if your appointment time is delayed, it could be that a very distressed patient has had to be helped. After the PCPTS receives the forms, the patient would then be contacted and a telephone interview would take place; after this, the therapist would consider what could be the best path for this patient to follow, either through the PCPTS or privately. There are trained practitioners working in the area and charges range from £35 to £100.

It is relatively easy to access Primary Care, but to gain access to Secondary Care is more difficult.

She gave two web-sites which could be tried: www.liveitwell.org.uk and www.getselfhelp.co.uk.

Samaritans Most of us think we know what Samaritans do, but that would be only half the truth. They are a charity, but not a religious organisation. They get no financial help at all from the government. There are also misconceptions about what Samaritans deal with, such as they only deal with those who are suicidal. This is far from the truth. People ring up about all sorts of things, which to them are life changing, such as the death of a favourite pet, or not being able to buy enough for their children to eat.

The people who train to be Samaritans are just ordinary people and volunteers are trained and assessed over six months. Calls can be harrowing, so the volunteers have to be able to be empathetic and strong.

The organisation is there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You will always get an answer if you ring, as offices are net-worked. As a modern charity, you can also email, contact the web, or even visit a branch.

"Samaritans are there when all your friends are asleep and you are alone in the world. When you're full of thoughts, that you don't understand, it's good to get them out." Those thoughts will never be divulged to anyone else.