The Three NIHR Research Schools Mental Health Programme Career Development Award.

Life after discharge from mental health services. Understanding the experiences of service users with severe mental illness in general practices: An exploratory-descriptive qualitative study within a primary care network in Greater Manchester.
Study Protocol.

Context

I am a Mental Health Advanced Clinical Practitioner working in GP practices within a Primary Care Network in Bolton, Northwest of England. I have identified a gap in service provision for patients with severe and enduring mental illness (SMI) who have been discharged from secondary care mental health services.

As part of the NIHR Career Development Award, I carried out a systematic scoping review of the evidence and found a paucity of studies focusing on SMI patients solely seen in general practice.

Aims/Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of patients with SMI in the context of discharge from secondary care mental health services back to the care of their general practitioner. With a view to understanding current practices and processes and informing future ones.

The main research question is:

What are the experiences of SMI patients in this context?
Based on these research questions, the objectives for the study are to:

- Elicit experiences of receiving care in general practice having been discharged from secondary care mental health services.
- Explore expectations for care in general practice - what are perceived hopes and/or fears for individuals with SMI moving forward.
- Elicit recommendations for how an SMI pathway can be formalised in general practice.

Sample size

The study will aim to recruit 18-22 participants until saturation. This study will be employing semi-structured interviews.

Data collection/generation methods

Semi-structured interview, either face to face or online, whichever is most acceptable to the participant, will be the method of data collection. Written consent will be obtained before each interview and each participant will be reminded that they can withdraw at any time, that data will be confidential and anonymised (NHS Health Research Authority, 2019, GMMH, 2020).

Conclusions/Impact

The anticipated findings from this study could begin to address the gap in evidence and service provision. As such, having the potential to inform a new Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) co co–designed, model of care, that better serve the needs of these patients. Supporting the translation of evidence into routine practice to maximise improvements in service and patient outcomes for this underserved patient group.

The **NIHR Schools** for Primary Care Research (SPCR), Public Health Research (SPHR) and Social Care Research (SSCR) (**"three schools"**) have joined together in a unique collaboration between leading academic centres in England to collaborate on a programme of work on **Mental Health**, led by the SPCR and funded through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

Background

People living with severe mental illness (SMI) are one of the most marginalised and disenfranchised groups in society. These conditions have the potential to severely impair functional and occupational activities, increase the likelihood of social exclusion and rank among the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries worldwide.

There is no clear direction as to who should manage patients with stable SMI, who no longer require the expertise of specialist secondary care services. A number of these patients continue to have a high need for treatment, monitoring and support, despite no longer having acute symptomology and not meeting the high thresholds for community mental health services. There is a need to understand patients experiences of having their care solely managed in general practice.

Design

The study will employ an exploratory-descriptive qualitative approach (Hunter et al., 2019), utilising an inductive framework analysis (Gale et al., 2013).

In line with principles of co-production, peer researchers (individuals with lived experience of SMI) will be involved in the study to ensure the voice of this vulnerable population is heard, including recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination.

Sampling principles and recruitment procedures

Patients with SMI who have been discharged from secondary care mental health services will be purposively sampled through an NHS Primary Care Network (PCN) in Greater Manchester. The sampling approach will aim to ensure representation of different SMI diagnosis, including schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, and other psychoses as per ICD10 (WHO, 1992), both males and females with different periods under the care of secondary care and duration since discharge.

Data analysis

Anonymised transcripts will be analysed by the analysis team, using Framework Analysis. The analysis team will meet regularly to discuss their emergent codes to ensure that these remain grounded in the original data for validity. Data will be tabulated and sorted into key themes using the steps of framework analysis.
- Familiarisation with the interview transcripts and the contextual and reflective notes.
- Coding of the data to develop and then apply the "analytical framework", defined as a set of codes organised into categories to manage and organise the data, derived from immersion in the data.
- Charting of the data into the framework matrix
- Interpreting the data considering the research question.

What next

- Develop a co-production group and feedback the findings of the systematic scoping review and agree research questions for the study.
- Develop a study steering group prioritising diverse and inclusive representation, developing and implementing a hybrid PPIE group meeting format, to maximise involvement from members who prefer one-to-one engagement. I plan to develop inclusive terms of reference for both groups with consideration of digital exclusion within SMI populations.
- Application submitted for a NIHR Pre-clinical Academic Fellowship to allow competition of this study and develop a research proposal for a Doctoral Fellowship to complete the next phases of this study.
- Developing a new role, incorporating research into practice, to become a future research leader and an expert in the field.