Professionalism and the role of mental health social workers

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The ground to cover....

• What is going well, what is not, what is contested
• The developing ‘reform’ agenda
• How stakeholders productively work together
• Professionalism and social work
• Evidencing the benefit of social work
• Update on TCSW developments
Context

• Social work reform board + post Munro debate

• Developments in qualifying and post-qualifying/CPD training reviews and innovations

• New professional constellations: Chief SWs, TCSW, PSW

• Changing organisational ‘forms’: commissioning + delivery through new types of agency and processes

• High profile ‘cases’: public critiques
Context

• A unified profession? Changing/challenging discourses:
  • Specialist vs fragmented
  • ‘User control’ vs ‘need for scepticism’
  • ‘Authority’ vs ‘Co production’
  • Commonalities with differences?

• Crowded ‘territories’: synergy not duplication
• TCSW strong voice + custodian of standards
• The role of the two Chief SWs
• Lessons from education/medicine.... strong practice led system leadership: credible + authoritative
So what is the problem?

- Professional status + standing
- Practice quality and outcomes
- Many voices, many ideas
- Resourcing workforce choices
Professional Status and standing

General

- Institutionalised ambivalence – society ‘dustbin’
- Media ‘default’ position
- ‘Culture’: what kind of professionalism (Don Brand)
- Beyond qualification: career pathways + CPD
Professional Status and standing

Children:

- Ofsted + SCRs: – illuminating or obscuring?
- Beautiful basics?
- Research on ‘what works’
- Retention struggles
Professional Status and standing

Adults:

- (Too) many flowers blooming
- Invisibility or marginality?
- Care management ‘strait jackets’?
- Business case (TCSW): need coherent discourse
- Research base more opaque?
Professional Status and standing

Mental Health:
Public invisibility
More independent professional decision making as AMHP
Overdefined by AMHP role
Less modernised personalised social care evident
Exemplar professional lead roles in some services
Closer to health professions’ identities?
Experiencing splits or exemplifying integration?
The importance of social work within mental health services

• What we do........
  – Understanding and protecting people’s legal rights
  – Understanding people’s needs in social and familial context
  – Intervening at the intersections of the emotional and material worlds
  – Safeguarding people from exploitation and abuse
  – Taking a whole lifespan, whole person approach
  – Focusing on equalities and anti-discrimination
  – Taking a strengths/assets based approach and promoting personalised, self-directed support
The importance of social work within mental health services

- "When people are made vulnerable – by poverty, bereavement, addiction, isolation, mental distress, disability, neglect, abuse or other circumstances – what happens next matters hugely. ......Good social workers can and do make a huge difference in these difficult situations. They are needed now as much, if not more, than ever. Their professional skills and knowledge can help people to take back control of their lives, through a genuine partnership between the social worker and the service user. When this is not possible, and people are at serious and significant risk, social workers can use statutory powers to resolve the crisis.

- (Social Work Task Force Final Report 2009 p7)
The importance of social work within mental health services

• „The social work profession promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. “
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

A consultation with social workers, ADASS, service users, teachers and researchers

Proposed 4 key areas of practice and the beginnings of a whole CPD framework for MHSWs
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

• This document responds to calls within the social work profession and within the mental health sector for greater clarity and direction for mental health social work. This paper aims to:
  – define the current priorities of professional social work across the adult mental health sector;
  – look to emerging and future priorities for the profession
  – describe the good social work leadership needed in mental health to take the profession forward
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

• Current challenges and priorities
  – Integration
  – Leading on complex work
  – Impact on culture and whole systems

• Emerging and future priorities: Innovation, co-production and new contexts for social work activity

• Social work and whole system commissioning and partnerships

• Setting the priorities and scope of adult mental health social workers
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

A.
Mental Health Social workers will focus on ensuring citizens have access to statutory social care and social work services and advice, discharging the legal duties and policies in line with local and national social care and health outcomes frameworks
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

B.

A high proportion of Mental Health Social Workers will continue to train and practice as AMHPs, supported by clear, unambiguous Local Authority leadership and accountability.
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

C. Social workers will use their skills to intervene and show professional leadership in situations characterised by high levels of social and interpersonal complexity and risk.
The Role of Mental Health Social Workers

D. Social workers will work effectively and innovatively with local communities, to support resilience, inclusion, safety and work preventively with individuals and families, promoting social justice, equalities and rights.
Initial feedback on paper

- 25 responses – mostly detailed and Xmany representing views of groups of social workers
- Broadly very supportive of aims and content of paper
- General view that shorter paper/s targeted at key audiences would be more effective
- Some viewed it as overoptimistic, some as slightly apologetic!
Initial feedback on paper: some additions/changes

1. Emphasise social work’s interagency and inter-sector (eg child/adult) work
2. More emphasis on the whole family and systemic aspects of good practice
3. Make more explicit links with public health and with prevention
4. More on social work’s role in promoting social perspectives in mental health, impacting on culture of mental health organisations and promoting alternative theory/practice to dominant mainstream
5. More on relationship basis of practice
6. Increase the emphasis on the importance of effective integration with health and NHS-based social work leadership
7. Increase reference to strengths based approach
8. Need to wrestle with the ‘community work’ vs ‘statutory work’ – polarity?
9. Role of social work in supervisory, advisory and consultation capacities across disciplines
10. Be sure to include the well being of social workers themselves
• ....could we also mention the impact of not getting it right first time – look at A&E admissions / GP surgeries – do we assess for social care needs at all points of access into NHS services? And if we assess – are we restricted from acting due to eligibility criteria? Often the drive to ensure social work resource is managed ‘effectively’ means adhering to FACS criteria – possibly at the longer term detriment of communities and ultimately commissioning outcomes
  • ADASS Regional Feedback
‘I would fully support the view that ‘social work is about much more than the judicious allocation of limited public resources. ’Much more needs to be done to enable social workers to engage in social action, co-production and work with citizen groups, working alongside people experiencing mental health difficulties. Recognition of wider health inequalities, beyond those simply relating to access to health care, needs to be recognised as part of the social work role in addressing structural inequalities and social injustice. One of the particular contributions of social work is to work with the person in their environment and this requires the sensitive balancing of unique and individual needs with wider issues that are affecting their lives – eg housing / immigration / physical health / poverty. This also requires working with other agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors as well as with service user and care groups. Social workers are uniquely placed to offer a wider perspective and a range of social interventions that are a vital component of mental health services.’
• Social Workers have an ability to work flexibly with an individual but in addition to this see the individual within a wider social context and take action to influence organisations and institutions and affect broader social change that positively impacts on individuals and groups.
The Professional Capabilities Framework
Professional Status and standing

Professionalism - PCF

Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession, a title protected in UK law. Social workers demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for their conduct, practice and learning, with support through supervision. As representatives of the social work profession they safeguard its reputation and are accountable to the professional regulator.
Different Voices

• Multiple voices: complementing or contradicting?

• Those that do, manage, research, teach….or inspect!
  • Deepening society’s experience of social work impact

• Securing consensus .....but gritty + challenging

• Coherent narratives: incl when ‘things go wrong’

• Government also has ‘silos’ ! Working with these
What is to be done next?

1. Practice led system leadership:
   • Grit + grip of new social work institutions
   • PSWs: authority, expertise, priorities
   • SWs: ambassadors, mentors, knowledge generators, (+ auditors)
   • CSWs

2. CPD coherent framework - raising standards

3. ‘Well reasoned practice’ everyday
   • Evidence percolating decision making
   • Supervision: models for reflection + performance

4. Social work ‘offer’ return on investment
Roles and Contributions

• New strategic alliances: leadership

• TCSW: practice, policy + public profile
  • ‘Our College: speaks for us, advises us, connects us’
  • Voice + value

• Conditions to support good practice

• ‘Fearsome’ + courageous debate: different solutions, better outcomes

• ‘Altruism under social auspices’ ....?
Evidence about practice quality and outcomes

- Practice triangle: intellectual knowledge/analysis + resilience + skills
- Best practice: knowing, spotting + celebrating
- Practitioners: need vs affordability
- PCF – shared language – (with tensions!)
- Reflective practice/supervision/organisationsSupervision + managing: reorientation + skilling up
Evidence about practice quality and outcomes

- Building the evidence base for social work
- Building alliances between the College and Higher Ed and Research
- College as a repository of knowledge and evidence
- Adding value to other parts of the Social Care and Social Work related evidence bodies
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