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Can Generic Therapeutic Communities meet the needs of people with Intellectual Disabilities?

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Background: Access to specialized therapeutic communities (TC) for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) such as Camphill communities and TC plus is limited and patchy in the UK. Nonetheless, the emphasis for sometimes has enable people with ID to access main-stream services, which have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate this.

Aim: The aim of this study is to propose a set of recommendations in order to improve the access of people with ID to main-stream therapeutic communities and enhance the services they receive.

Methods: This is a qualitative study with phenomenology and ethnography approaches. Information was gathered between April 2013 and May 2014 from talking to professionals, direct observation and interaction with service users at generic and specialized TC. In addition, we conducted in-depth interviews with consultants in ID, a consultant psychiatrist in psychotherapy, and a senior therapist at a generic TC.

Findings: People with borderline and mild ID are able to benefit from generic TCs. However, the screening criteria used in TC are not suitable for people with ID. People with moderate to profound ID, those with no/limited speech or with prominent autistic features would benefit from using “specialized TCs” rather than “generic TCs”. Placing an individual with ID in a generic TC has implications for that person, other TC members and staff.

Conclusions: Generic TCs need to make some adjustments to their screening criteria, staff skills/attitude/role and communication tools (e.g. visual aids) to meet the need of people with ID. In addition, extra work on emotional intelligence, attending longer “preparation group”, more flexible approach to the withdrawal of psychotropic medications and input from other services could facilitate the process and optimize the outcomes. The vulnerability and suggestibility of people with ID should be considered carefully. The risk of being bullied or re-enforcement of maladaptive behaviors should be closely monitored by TC staff.

Biography

Farshad Shaddel is a Consultant and Clinical Supervisor in Psychiatry of intellectual disabilities, a Member of Royal College of Psychiatrists, an honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer at Oxford University and a Senior Fellow of Higher Education Academy. He has worked with the HETV (Oxford Deanery) as a Faculty member to deliver educational supervisor training workshop and Post-graduate certificate in clinical education. He is a member of exam sub-committee at Royal College of Psychiatrists.

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