

# **News Release: Health professionals reaffirm importance of showing respect to improve mental health and other clinical outcomes.**



The Queen's  
*Nursing Institute*

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Almost 200 community nurses and other health professionals who work with people who lack a secure home attended a major conference on 12 May. The packed event held at Regent's College in London was the first ever national conference for community nurses working in this field. Delegates attended from Denmark, Belgium, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland as well as from England and Wales.

The conference was organised as part of the QNI's Homeless Health Initiative, supported by the Big Lottery Fund. The event was chaired by QNI Chair of Trustees, Rosalynde Lowe. Sessions at the event included: 'Pregnant and Homeless: Where Next?', 'Self harm', 'How do we meet homeless families' mental health needs?' and 'Working together to improve health outcomes for homeless people.'

Speakers were drawn from across the professional, state and voluntary sectors and included Howard Sinclair, CEO of homeless charity Broadway, Stephen Robertson, CEO of the Big Issue Foundation, Professor Richard Wilkinson from the University of Nottingham, author of the recent book 'The Spirit Level', Professor Panos Vostanis from the University of Leicester, Helen Carroll OBE, Dr Angela Jones, Chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners' Health Inequalities Standing Group and Richard Pacitti, CEO of Mind in Croydon and adviser on the NICE guidelines on self harm.

Professor Wilkinson highlighted the importance of paying attention to issues of client respect. He said, "Issues of respect are crucial in every walk of life and every institution where people feel ignored or valued. You can make that happen or you can fail to make that happen." He added, "Insecurity resulting from experiences in early childhood has the most profound effect mental health in later life, and one of the most fundamental challenges nurses face is overcoming the effects of this early abuse among their clients". He reminded delegates that "friendship is a well recognised protective factor for health".

Stephen Robertson echoed his views saying that "improving the quality of social relationships is a huge factor in improving the psychological health of whole sections of the population." Richard Pacitti also pointed out that the same point of view was also central to his recommendations to the NICE guidelines on self harm. Andrew Campbell from Brent Homeless User Group spoke from a service users' point of view and told how, "a supportive environment had enabled me to do things I never thought possible three years ago."

Director of the QNI, Rosemary Cook said, "We felt that the conference provided a very fitting way to mark International Nurses Day. The theme of Nurses Day this year is 'Delivering Quality, Serving Communities: Nurses Leading Care Innovations' and that is exactly what this conference was about. The conference has enabled a huge amount of specialist knowledge to be shared which will benefit nurses working directly with some of the most vulnerable people in society in their local communities."

Community nurse and conference delegate Jane Gray said, "Richard Wilkinson delivered an excellent lecture reminding us of the importance of respect and dignity for the people that we serve. This may seem obvious, but when we deliver care, equity is not just about being able to access a doctor or nurse; how we deliver care and in what surroundings matters too. From my own experience I know that welcoming patients into decent and well equipped surroundings must be the norm and not the exception."

She continued, "Andrew Campbell rightly stressed that service user input is vital, but every nurses' view is equally important as we all have individual experiences. When we put these together a picture emerges; we see where the gaps are and what we need to do to address these. If each nurse responded to the Homeless Health Initiative online survey we might have this picture for health. I would urge every nurse to take a couple of minutes to do this because their voice really will make a difference."

Pictures of the event are available from the QNI.

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors**

The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI), registered charity 213128, provides a range of support to community nurses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Homeless Health Initiative was created by the QNI in 2007 in response to the lack of support identified by community nurses working with homeless people, to support them to better meet the complex health needs of this vulnerable group. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund over three years, it has a membership of around 500 community nurses in England and Wales (the original target was 110). It offers professional development, tailored resources, peer support and networking opportunities.

More information about the Initiative's online survey is available on the QNI's website at <http://www.qni.org.uk/homeless-health-initiative/index.html>