**NES AHP Contribution to Public Health**

Meeting with Sinead Braiden, Art Therapist/Arts Therapies Professional Lead NHS Tayside and

Non-Executive Director & Chair, Staff Governance Committee, NHS Fife

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3 February 2022

**Summary of profession and key populations**

Sinead has lots of contact with the Director of Public Health through her non-exec role with NHS Fife, where she has learned lots about wider healthcare, health inequality and the wider determinants of health. Already had a background in this through her work in Mental Health as poverty is really stressful and puts people at greater risk of mental health issues and drug abuse. When Sinead first met DPH, she was pleased that Sinead spoke about wider determinants of PH as “most people think PH is just immunisation”! Sinead feels that social issues that impact on health have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

In clinical role, works as Art Therapist at Murray Royal Hospital (General Adult Psychiatry). Arts Therapies is umbrella term for Art Therapy, Music Therapy, Drama Therapy (all HCPC regulated) and Dance Movement Therapy (doesn’t currently have HCPC status). Arts Therapies can be particularly helpful with people who have communication difficulties who haven’t engaged with other psychological therapies. They are particularly helpful with trauma as can allow people to express difficult feelings that they have been unable to put into words previously as it is less threatening than talking about something directly.

In NHS Tayside, all Arts Therapy work is with hospital in-patients but Sinead is aware of Arts Therapists working in Community and Primary Care in other areas. This means that she is working with people on the more severe and enduring end of the mental health spectrum. Patients can be referred by any member of the team and can also self-refer. She works with both individuals and groups. In the voluntary sector, Arts Therapists work with marginalised groups like the homeless and refugee communities. Art Therapies aim to improve peoples’ mental health and enable them to have more insight into their illness. Outcomes are demonstrated using a tool called Creative Arts Therapies Session Rating Scale and other more generalised psychological therapy outcome measures. Successful discharges from hospital would also be an outcome measure.

**Contribution to health protection**

Did not identify any examples

**Contribution to wider determinants**

Feels that Arts Therapists really do have a role to play in this domain and has begun fusing this together over her two roles. Experience of working in mental health is that there are huge disparities depending on socioeconomic backgrounds. People who come from more impoverished backgrounds tend to have serious longstanding mental health issues that are very difficult to treat. In terms of reaching those that are in greatest need, feels that every single patient on the wards that they work has complex needs. However, in order to benefit from service, patients need to be “psychologically minded”, they need to be able to think about their concerns and reflect on them rather than just “sit and draw”. Normally have a trial period to see if patients are going to get something out of it. It’s not about keeping people busy and building their art skills. Described the service as a “mopping up service”, working with patients that have been in the system for years, unable to engage with other services but able to engage through art mediums. This work can then help them to engage with other services subsequently. Could not identify any examples of a whole systems approach, other than working with the multidisciplinary team, bridging the gap between in-patients and health & social care.

**Contribution to health improvement**

Lots of potential to work with other AHPs and signpost to other services. Patients who are on psychiatric drugs may become overweight because of the impact on appetite and lack motivation to exercise because they are depressed. Gave example of patient she had worked with in conjunction with dietitian. Patient was very overweight and helped himself to lots of food on the ward. Through Art Therapy, Sinead learned that patient had come from a background of serious neglect and food insecurity so now whenever he saw food, his instinct was to get as much as he possibly could. Arts Therapists use psychodynamic and person-centred psychological approaches to support patients to discuss emotional issues behind eating disorders and disordered eating. By the time patients are in hospital, they are often quite involved in other services but when they are being discharged, would link up with third sector organisations, e.g. Turning Point, where appropriate.

**Contribution to population healthcare**Sinead worked for a long time on the psychiatric rehabilitation ward and recognises that there is definitely a place for Arts Therapies there, working a bit longer term with patients there. Unable to prevent admissions as do not have a community resource but really should as Arts Therapies could prevent admissions. There is a definitely potential for Arts Therapies to be involved at a much earlier stage rather than being a “mopping up service”. It is quite frustrating only ever seeing people when they have lots of health conditions and are extremely mentally unwell. If Arts Therapies could intervene earlier down the line, could support people to stay in the community but community resources for mental health are often under-resourced and as such they are currently unable to shift the balance of care in the way they would like to.

**Professional body support**

Sinead is not a member of the professional body (British Association of Art Therapists) and is not aware of anything in particular that they do to support public health.

Not aware of any current national public health projects within Arts Therapies.

**Barriers to Arts Therapists becoming more involved with Public Health**

Involved too late

Politics within the NHS – whenever any funding comes through, AHPs are at the bottom of the heap and Arts Therapists are at the bottom of the AHP heap. It is such a tiny profession and misunderstood. In the years of austerity, things have dwindled away to almost nothing so there is a need to build things back up again. Some Health Boards may just have 1 or 2 WTE posts or even none. However, there is a thriving service in NHS Lothian.

Sinead felt it had been a good conversation and it had sparked ideas in terms of what the Arts Therapies can offer in a Public Health approach. She is currently supervising a music therapy intervention and agreed to try completing the RSPH case study template to show case the work.

**Sheila Wilson**

**16 February 2022**