

# News

Friday 27 February 2009

## **NHS depression course changed my life: Says Torbay mum**

A Paignton mother-of-three has spoken out about how her life has dramatically improved since she signed up for a ground-breaking free course designed to help people in Torbay cope with depression.

A year on from the launch of an NHS national trial which aims to encourage people experiencing depression to take a more active role in their care, Armine Pearson took the decision to publicly tell her story, motivated by the desire to help others in a similar situation.

Ms Pearson, who lives with bi-polar, also known as manic depression, said: “The self-management course has turned my life around. Prior to attending the course a year ago, I was coping, but a bit up and down and often felt quite depressed.

“The course helped me recognise the trigger points for my condition. I now have a set of very effective coping mechanisms that I use at appropriate times, usually when I feel myself becoming stressed or irrational. And my medication has reduced a lot.”

Ms Pearson explained: “As a group we learned skills and shared ideas on pacing ourselves - doing things in manageable chunks, being more assertive and we explored ways of saying ‘no’, which had been something I had found difficult. We also learned effective ways of communicating with family members, using our eyes for meaningful expression, for example.

“We set realistic specific goals and shared them with the group, which meant we were more likely to carry them out. Mine usually involved setting aside time for exercise and relaxation, which still help me enormously.

Amine's group found the course so beneficial that all the delegates became self-management tutors at the end of the seven weeks.

The self-management course is part of a national pilot project in the treatment of depression run by just two NHS trusts in the country. Torbay Care Trust and Devon Partnership NHS Trust run the project together in the south-west and their pilot partner is St George's Mental Health NHS Trust in London.

The project is based on evidence from the states, where trials have shown that when doctors and patients with long-term conditions work together using specific techniques, results can be dramatic.

Chris Jackson, Self Care Lead with Torbay Care Trust, said: "The thrust of the project is giving patients more control to improve their own health, and setting achievable goals with their GP, which are then followed up, so progress can be monitored. The patient self-management course is just half the story. We also run courses for GPs to train them in techniques that encourage patients to take a more active role in their health.

"There is much interest in the project, but we would like to see more people come along to our self-management courses, in particular, which are free and can offer invaluable skills to people who are mild to moderately depressed."

Armine now feels in control of her condition, rather than the other way around.

She said: "I'm on a very low dose of medication now, much lower than before. And getting involved with this project and being a tutor on the self-management programme gives me a huge sense of purpose. I am using what I have learned to help other people and that makes me happy."

The next seven-week depression self-management course starts on Wednesday 4 March in Torquay and the trust is trialling a Saturday morning course for people who work during the day, starting 7 March in Paignton.

Other self-management courses, including the Expert Patient Programme, for people living with long-term conditions, starts on Tuesday 3 March in Torquay. A Looking After Me for Carers course, starts on Thursday 5 March.

Anyone interested in attending these courses should contact Chris Jackson on 07825 781202 for more information, or to book, the national team can be contacted on 0800 030 4225.

- Ends -

## **Notes to editors**

**Armine is available for interviews on Thursday (19 February) from 10am to 4pm. Chris Jackson is also on hand to talk to media.**

The pilot project, called the Co-creating Health Initiative, is funded by the Health Foundation, which is a charitable organisation and provides support, skills and tools through a whole-system improvement project. The aim of the initiative is to demonstrate that increased provision of self management support leads to improved health outcomes.

In February 2008, Torbay Care Trust and Devon Partnership NHS Trust launched the pilot project and became a demonstration site to develop self-management of depression in Torbay.

There are only eight demonstration sites in the country. Sites have been 'twinned' to look at the long term conditions of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), diabetes, musculo-skeletal pain and depression. Two sites will be developing self management for depression - Torbay and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, South West London.

The initiative has 15 months remaining and involves activity at local and national levels.