

Development of the Forensic Managed Care Network for Northern Ireland

The Bamford review of mental health and learning disability services in Northern Ireland recommended the need to provide appropriate assessment, treatment and rehabilitation, for people with a mental illness who are subject to the criminal justice system and pose a significant risk of serious harm to others. It also recommended that forensic services consider the needs of service users, their careers, the wider public and other health service providers.

McCann (1999) described the needs of the forensic patient as being complex, involving a number of agencies, requiring a collaborative and coordinated approach across service and professional boundaries. Forensic services work collaboratively with the five Trust services in Northern Ireland, for example: generic mental health teams; Intellectual Disability teams; substance misuse teams; primary care, and social care. In addition they link with the independent sector and criminal justice agencies, such as: courts; police; prison; probation and public prosecution services. There is a need for close working relationships between these groups in order to promote positive outcomes, with the overall aim of forensic services being to reduce offending behaviour and minimise risk to others.

Recent regional investment has been directed at services targeting community Intellectual Disability and child and adolescent client groups. There is currently a review of the Intellectual Disability service in Northern Ireland to help shape the service model for the future, including the community team and inpatient forensic service.

The last review of Forensic Mental Health and Intellectual Disability services in Northern Ireland was carried out in 2006 and highlighted that the service fell substantially below the standards set in other parts of the UK.

Prior to the opening of Shannon Clinic, Medium Secure Unit (MSU), in 2005, there was no specialist inpatient forensic service in Northern Ireland. Forensic patients were treated in psychiatric intensive care units across the region, in prison and in the high secure facility Carstairs State Hospital, Scotland. Community patients were managed by generic community mental health services. There were other forensic patients in other high and medium secure units across the UK who were then repatriated back to Northern Ireland.

There is currently no specific forensic low secure provision in Northern Ireland for mental health patients. The community forensic teams were developed across the region in parallel with the development of the Shannon Clinic.

The Six Mile low secure unit opened in 2006. This is a purpose built facility which provides care for adult males with intellectual disability who are in contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and require a level of secure care. In 2008

the responsibility for healthcare within all prisons in Northern Ireland was transferred to local health Trusts.

The Community Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service is a new development to forensic services in Northern Ireland . It is a multi-professional team of health and social care and youth justice specialists, developed in partnership with the local Trust and the Youth Justice Agency.

The Forensic Managed Care Network for Northern Ireland was established in May 2018. It was developed to sustain the coordination of multi-agency working across Health and Social Care Services, Criminal Justice Agencies, Third Sector and user and carer organisations. The FMCN will ensure continuity of regional service coordination, cooperation and planning for the benefit of a complex and often high-risk client group, who are supported by carers and family members. Forensic Mental Health Services assess and treat justice-involved people with mental illness and patients with major behavioural, mental health problems and intellectual disability, in a range of secure health facilities and the community, in police stations, courts and prisons (Ridley et al, 2014).

The Forensic Managed Care Network covers both mental health and Intellectual Development Disabilities Services. It is a partnership initiative in collaboration with the Scottish Forensic Network and the Irish National Forensic Mental Health Services, Dublin, Ireland. The Forensic Network Manager was appointed in July 2019 in conjunction with a local Trust for a period of six months.

Noel McDonald, MSc
Forensic Network Manager, Northern Ireland