

Collaboration between doctors, counsellors and agencies essential for improved mental health

Fr Peter McVerry is to speak at the 31st AGM of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) this weekend in Dublin. He will tell delegates that his experiences could perhaps have lessons for the wider provision of mental health services.

Fr Peter McVerry said that the most prevalent mental health issues among homeless people were depression, suicidal ideation, and low self esteem.

“But the problem is they are sent chasing a number of different services, such as psychiatrists, drugs counsellors, abuse counsellors and they are also dealing with a homelessness service trying to access emergency or longer-term accommodation,” said Fr McVerry.

“Different services may well be doing an excellent job within their own sphere but they are often working in isolation and in the end are not very effective in meeting the full needs of the individual,” he said. “There is a need for greater collaboration between the different services to provide the right help to people at different times in their lives.”

Shane Kelly, Professional Services manager of IACP, said that the professions of medicine, counselling and psychotherapy should work in a more collaborative way. GPs can involve counselling and psychotherapy as part of the healing process and should consider recommending certain patients for these treatments when it is felt to be appropriate.

The over-65 age group is particularly at risk. A nationwide study undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes for the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) has highlighted that over-65s are less likely to open up about their problems.

- One in four (23%) over-65s keep their personal problems and difficulties to themselves. This figure is nearly double the rate for the overall adult population (13%).
- While 70% of people said they would discuss problems with a friend or family member, only one in two (49%) over-65s would share their problems.
- A quarter (25%) of Irish people have ever attended counselling or psychotherapy, but only one in seven (14%) of over-65s have attended.

The study was carried out in order to better understand the value that Irish people attach to availing of counselling or psychotherapy services.

Dr Harry Barry, GP and author of several books on the subject, has a particular interest in mental health and has extensive experience of dealing with issues like anxiety and depression.

“Bottling up problems can exacerbate mental and physical problems. This research highlights the fact that mental and physical well-being can be affected in people who lack the social supports that they had when they were younger, such as family, work and social contact. Problems are always

lessened by talking about them and in many cases special listening therapies such as counselling can be hugely beneficial,” said Dr. Barry.

The IACP, who meet in Croke Park for their AGM this weekend, maintains professional standards of excellence in counselling and psychotherapy through education, training and accreditation in Ireland. Both professions provide professional help to people who are experiencing personal issues, in order to help alleviate those difficulties. The IACP continually develops high standards in the professions of counselling and psychotherapy. It is the largest regulatory body in Ireland to encourage development in these areas and to protect clients and therapists alike.

An online directory of IACP counsellors and psychotherapists is available at www.iacp.ie.

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About IACP:

Established in 1981, the IACP identifies, develops and maintains professional standards of excellence in counselling and psychotherapy through education, training and accreditation. In promoting best practice and the professional development of its members, IACP holds at its core the protection of the public. Representing both the interests of clients and practitioners (over 3,500 nationwide), IACP provides a telephone referral helpline, an information service; and an online counsellor / psychotherapist / supervisor directory. IACP is a registered Charity (CHY 6615).

More information is available from the IACP's website www.iacp.ie.