Freedom of Information Request

Reference Number: EPUT.FOI.18.584
Date Received: May 2018

*Note to Applicant: As of 1 April 2017, North Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (NEP) and South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT) merged to form one new organisation known as Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT).

Information Requested:

1. Please can you update the public as to how long the waiting times are currently for this service as mentioned in the following link: https://eput.nhs.uk/our-services/essex/mental-health-services/adults/aspergers-service/

   In late 2016 waiting times for diagnostic services were in excess of 2.5 years and are currently at approximately 12 months and continuing to reduce. The average waiting time is currently 26 weeks (longest wait is 57 weeks and shortest wait is 1 week as of 4 June). We are utilising other staff within the service to support the assessment process and are sharing skills and providing training to facilitate other professionals to support the process. We have agreed a plan to continue reducing waits with our Commissioners.

2. Also, who in EPUT is responsible for providing GP surgeries and MH resource centres / units / police / libraries with information as to what services are available for Essex patients?

   As a service we are part of the local partnership boards where we meet and share information with a range of different services including for example the Police, DWP and education. In terms of the Aspergers Service – the service itself is primarily responsible for providing information to MH resource centres/units as to what services are available. We work closely with the MH services locally and have provided training and leaflets for services in the south of Essex over the years since the service began. These teams will contact us regarding potential referrals and to check in more detail about services we may offer to individuals they assess.

   We also carry out, where appropriate, joint assessments with these teams. In addition to the wider MH teams/units we have also provided training for psychiatrist colleagues across North and South Essex around assessing Autism Spectrum Disorder, and informing them about our service specifications and role. Our service is not currently commissioned to take referrals from outside agencies so we would not anticipate that the police or GPs would make direct referrals. However we wrote out to the GPs within the first two years of the service being established (the service was established in September 2009) to let them know of the service and we copy them into letters/reports for individuals known to their surgeries. We have liaised directly with GP surgeries around managing referrals or ongoing work for individuals open to our service. We have linked with the police around individuals referred to our service where there have been criminal justice issues and have provided training and information for the liaison and diversion services in south Essex around Autism Spectrum Disorders.

   In February/March this year we facilitated a screening of individuals presenting to probation and the prison service to identify what percentage may be experiencing Autism Spectrum Disorders, with the probation and prison service staff.
3. Have such service points been informed of this service? I ask because many people still are unaware this service (EPUT Aspergers Service) exists.

As noted above, we do work with and link with other services and agencies. There will be changes to staffing in these agencies/services which may mean that not all staff are aware. Referrals to our service are internal, and come from, for example, First Response Teams and Psychiatry colleagues who are aware of our services and so will refer on as appropriate. Most referrals originate from GPs or from within MH services.

4. With the merger of North & South Essex NHS - does this mean this service is available pan-Essex?

The merger of North and South Essex NHS Trusts and the formation of EPUT has allowed us to share skills with services in the North of Essex in the form of opening access to the Psychiatry training we provided last year (July 2017) in addition to providing training and support for Psychology colleagues who work in the other areas of Essex. We are not commissioned to provide diagnostic services for areas in Essex other than those in the South. Diagnostic services across the remaining parts of Essex are currently provided by other NHS Trusts.

5. Were additional resources put in to the service? How has this improved the situation re waiting times and level of staff etc.?

Additional funding was provided to the Aspergers Service by our commissioners in 2016 to address the issue of long waiting times for diagnostic assessment. At that time the waiting time for diagnostic assessment was in excess of 2.5 years. At the present time the waiting time for assessment is approximately 12 months but is continuing to reduce. The average waiting time is currently 26 weeks (longest wait is 57 weeks and shortest wait is 1 week as of 4 June). The range in waiting times is dependent on individual circumstances. For example, sometimes service users are unable to take up offered appointments due to their being away, and this can extend their wait.

The additional funding has meant that we have been able to extend the hours of the Occupational Therapist we have within the service from 2 days to 2.5 days with the additional time being used to contribute to the assessment process. We have completed training in house to develop the skills of the postholder who was recruited in April 2017 to enable them to undertake assessments where there is a clear cut presentation. The Clinical Psychology input to the service was increased to full-time and this has been used to focus on completing assessments and training other staff within the team as well as sharing skills with other agencies. The funding enabled us to employ a Consultant grade Clinical Psychologist who specialises in Autistic spectrum challenges, and has a particular interest in Aspergers. An additional clinical psychology day has recently been recruited to (April 2018) and this individual is beginning assessments in June.

In addition to working on reducing the waiting time for diagnostic assessments, we have continued to provide additional support post diagnosis to individuals seen by our service as well as those individuals who have received a diagnosis elsewhere and require support with their Autism Spectrum Disorder. We have also continued to receive referrals into the service whilst working on reducing the waiting list and have noted an increase in referrals when compared to previous years both for diagnostic assessment as well as for support/intervention for those people with an existing diagnosis. This has obviously increased pressure on waiting times; however we are confident that our projected reduction in waiting times is on track even when these increases are taken into account.