

PRESS RELEASE:

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Homelessness is a healthcare issue: first UK International homeless health conference calls for the NHS to respond to the health needs of homeless people

Members of the Faculty of Homeless and Inclusion health today called for the new NHS commissioners to invest in services for the most vulnerable and excluded.

At their first conference today leading members of the Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health will ask Ministers and NHS leaders to press on with delivering their promise to 'improve the health of the poorest fastest.' New data presented at the conference shows the appalling health consequences of homelessness. They are a population apart in terms of rates of infectious diseases, heart disease, asthma, mental health, and mortality. At the same time the failure to tackle people's health problems is often a contributory factor to homelessness in the first place. And new evidence confirms that because homeless people get so sick, they end up costing the NHS up to eight times more than people with a home.

The Faculty aims to show colleagues across the NHS that homeless patients deserve the same standards of care and compassion as any other patient that uses the NHS and that the NHS could do more to help homeless people overcome the health problems that often contribute to homelessness in the first place.

The Faculty today will call for:

- all NHS organisations to adopt the Faculty's core standards for health services for homeless people
- the Department of Health to ensure that the new health system recognises the costs of failing to properly fund homeless health services
- Commissioners to work with homeless sector organisations and homeless people to design more integrated services for homeless people.

Further, Faculty members today expressed their concerns at the likely long-term health consequences of the Government's welfare reforms, especially the imminent changes to the housing benefit regime. Any policy that leads to more homelessness is an investment in creating future burdens of ill-health.

Speaking at today's event Prof Aidan Halligan, first president of the faculty for homeless and inclusion health said:

“The clinicians attending today’s event are some of the most committed to be found working anywhere in the National Health Service. Specialist homeless health professionals have often chosen to work with some of the most vulnerable and damaged individuals in British society, and they demonstrate daily how compassion and professionalism can combine to deliver good health outcomes for the most challenging patients, and how services have to focus on the whole person to have any chance of helping homeless patients make progress with their lives. “

Stan Burridge, Pathway’s service user researcher and former rough sleeper said:

“Its great to see so many doctors, nurses and NHS managers coming together to talk about health services for homeless people. I am still in touch with the individual doctors who played a big part in helping me come off the streets. As homelessness keeps going up it’s vital that the NHS puts the right services in place. My own experience tells me that when the NHS lets homeless people down it just stores up more serious health problems for the future.”

Notes to editors

This international conference is aimed at everyone with a professional or personal interest in social exclusion and health determinants, the impact of inequality, homelessness, housing and social policy. It offers opportunities to hear from a wide range of policy-makers, commissioners, service providers and practitioners. With support from Inclusion Health and Pathway, people with lived experience of homelessness are being supported to play a key role in the conference. Full agenda at <http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/sh303/>

For interview requests and event details contact NSA on 020 7324 4330

The Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health was established in 2010 and is the first independent, multi-disciplinary body focused on the healthcare of homeless people and other excluded groups. Membership is open to medical professionals and people with personal experience of homelessness and an interest in health issues. All members share a commitment to patients being at the heart of healthcare, and to improving the way health services respond to and meet the complex needs of severely excluded groups. For more information about the Faculty, visit <http://www.collegeofmedicine.org.uk/faculties/faculty-care-homeless-people>

Pathway is a registered charity working with NHS staff to make health services better for homeless people. Pathway has developed models of integrated healthcare for single homeless people and rough sleepers, with care pathways planned around the individual patient. A registered charity, Pathway shares its models across the NHS and works with both commissioners and providers to improve the quality of healthcare delivered to the most excluded. For more info about Pathway visit <http://www.londonpathway.org.uk/index.php/>
Call Alex Bax, Pathway Chief Executive on 07775 625 093