

Media Release

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Recovery is likely. No straitjacket required

Some staff at Tauranga Hospital's community mental health service can remember a time when mental illness was considered irreversible and untreatable.

"As recent as the 1950s mental illness was managed through custodial institutionalised care, synonymous with straitjackets and locked doors," says Helene Stols, clinical coordinator for the service.

Things have come a long way since those days, with effective medication and therapeutic approaches developed and a much stronger focus on caring for people in the community and helping them recover.

5- 12 October is Mental Health Awareness Week and the service is determined to counter discrimination and stigmatisation by dispelling myths and helping people understand more about mental health.

"All the people we treat at Community Mental Health are on a journey to recovery to lead a full life in the presence or absence of symptoms. Many are discharged from our service to their GP. This service is a secondary specialist service with a focus on serious mental disorders and we work in collaboration with the primary health sector, " she says.

Around 800 adult cases are treated by the adult service at any one time, either self referred or referred by GPs or other agencies.

The service is run by multidisciplinary teams who provide ongoing case management and acute crisis support. The psychiatric acute community team offers a 24/7 service, and while there is an inpatient unit at the hospital, most clients are supported in the community.

“Community Mental health is part of a network of services in the region and we partner with CADS, Te Puna Hauora Kaupapa service and the inpatient unit, as well as community services, to provide a seamless service for our clients,” says Helene.

The District Health Board holds contracts with several community accommodation providers, who take a rehabilitative approach towards recovery. A new Friendly Landlord pilot project to support clients into independent rental living accommodation is currently underway. Current service development projects include a Suicide Prevention project and an Eating Disorders project. Recent internal structural changes have seen the amalgamation of the crisis team, intake and mobile intensive nursing services, to help ensure a seamless entry into the service.

“One of the biggest barriers to recovery for many is the attitudes of other people, who lack understanding of mental illness or base their judgement on historical outdated ideas,” Helene says. “By raising mental health awareness we enhance recovery in a supportive environment. A little bit of understanding goes a long way.”

Mental Health Awareness Week is 5-12 October. It will be celebrated with displays in local libraries, a stall at the Historic Village on Friday 9 October

**and the public is invited to join in a fun walk around the Mount on Monday
5 October at 2.30pm.**

Ends

For more information please contact:

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