

How should the next Mayor of London address mental health issues, and what are the different candidates saying?

Britain's National Health Service is in a crisis; with Junior Doctors striking and depression and suicides increasing by the year, more and more people are beginning to rely on our health services to help them – whether with physical or mental ailments. Childhood depression is on the rise, but with over-worked doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, people of all ages are seriously missing out on the help they need.

David Furness and his fellow members of the British National Party appear to think that the poor state of our National Health Service is down to immigration and under qualified staff: *'The NHS is critically ill. NHS Trusts are sacking staff, closing wards, cancelling operations and refusing patients vital life-saving drugs. Meanwhile, 'health tourists' are costing the NHS £2 billion a year...'*

The current Mayor of London, Boris Johnson has very strong views on mental health and I can't help but feel it is incredibly important that the next person we choose to elect feels the same, and has the right prerogative to do something about our failing psychiatric and mental health services.

At present, Boris and his team claim to be putting mental health *'firmly at the heart'* of their plans to improve the well-being of Londoners. He also says that *'it is time London faced up to mental ill health and the effects it has on our community'*. However Boris believes that due to the stigma mental health carries, people are not addressing the problem.

Robyn Taylor, community fundraiser at Target Ovarian Cancer agrees with this statement from Boris: *'I come from a loving family, but an old fashioned one. One where mental health is a closed door; a private, hushed conversation.'* Robyn said that she grew up *'oblivious to the depression'* which was greatly affecting a member of her family. She also added that *'having a stigma attached to such a debilitating condition such as depression is wrong, regressive and poisonous'*.

Perhaps in order to reach out to Londoners that are suffering with mental health issues, we first need get rid of this stigma and association and teach others about the different kinds of mental health, and what to do should we suspect someone in urgent need of psychological help.

Mia Stannard, a Learning Support Assistant at a secondary school in Southend, Essex thinks that the stigma of mental health needs to be addressed from a young age: *'The stigma attached to mental health issues needs to be diminished. Children and young adults should be able to openly discuss what is going on inside their heads without the fear of being labelled an attention seeker or told "it's just hormones". I believe spreading awareness from as young as possible is the best way to be.'* Mia thinks that this is possible to achieve *'without tarnishing their innocence'*.

Whilst we have around-the-clock medical care in the UK, we seem to have a lot less staff available for those that need psychiatric help. Getting the train into London everyday means that I am one of the first – along with my fellow passengers - to know when there has been a suicide, and I can honestly say that we hear of these incidents far too often. Granted a lot of people who feel suicidal do not want to talk to people or receive any kind of treatment, but I am sure that there are some that do, and if and when that time occurs they should have someone there for them.

If someone were to collapse in front of us in public, an ambulance would be called for within seconds. I wonder though, how many people would call for help for someone who appears to be unstable, suicidal or depressed. Of course physical injuries and illnesses come first due to their urgency and importance, but where are the professionals to help the mentally ill?

Paramedic Thomas Crudington believes that there needs to be *'a mental health service provided, that can come out to high risk patients who have the capacity to revoke consent'*. Thomas says that he has had *'many cases where a patient*

has threatened to commit suicide, but has been seen as technically able and sane enough to decline aid [from the Ambulance Service]'. He believes that we need the power to treat patients in their homes and not just in hospitals, as neither the Ambulance Service nor the Police can force a vulnerable person to a place of safety 'due to the person's human rights'. The Green Party agree with this notion and have said that we need to 'promote more inter-agency cooperation between the police, social services, physical and mental health organisations and youth services, for example by placing youth workers in A&E departments and increasing the number of school visits by local police officers.'

Reading through the other candidates manifesto's it appears that the subject of mental health is quite low down on some of their list of priorities - which is worrying considering how many people are having to go without the treatment and medication they require.

City worker Charlotte Welfare understands the pressures of working in a busy environment and has seen how stress can cause anxiety and poor mental health within the workplace. Charlotte believes that the next Mayor of London needs to implement mandatory counselling for '*high stress roles*'. She says '*they [health services] give out free eye tests for people working on computers, so why not free counselling for roles where depression and anxiety has become almost commonplace?*'.

Fortunately the Green Party's contender, Sian Rebecca Berry believes that mental health should not be taken lightly and that issues such as housing can really make a difference for mental health sufferers. One of Sian's policies is to '*make sure our housing policies form part of an integrated London strategy for improved mental health. Overcrowding and poor or precarious living conditions can lead to illness, and people with mental health problems are too often left to fall into homelessness.*' This is another aspect that we often forget - a lot of homeless people have mental health issues, but have no one to turn to and are even more susceptible to further illnesses. Sian also believes that her duties as Mayor should extend to 'promoting physical activity for daily trips with great streets for walking and cycling, making sure healthy food is widely available, supporting good mental health and wellbeing and reducing the risk of disease at all stages of our lives.'

With all of these ideas and promises, we can only hope that the next Mayor of London takes into consideration what the public have to say, and that mental health will be considered just as important as our physical health.