Cerdic Hall is rewarded for his visionary exchange programme

Modernising mental health in Africa

Thanks to primary care mental health liaison nurse Cerdic Hall, mental health services in Uganda are gradually being brought into line with the latest thinking. As a result of his work, services in east London are on a learning curve too.

Funded by the Tropical Health and Education Trust, which forges links between the NHS and overseas development projects, Cerdic has visited Uganda as part of a project that encourages clients to become involved in services, and establish strong links with services in the UK.

Uganda’s largest mental health hospital, in the capital Kampala, has about 900 patients. When the project began eight years ago, wards were overcrowded, some patients were sharing beds and guards controlled the patients with batons.

‘A lot of stigma surrounds mental ill-health in Uganda,’ Cerdic explained. ‘Many people believe mental illness is evil and mentally ill people can be subject to violence.’

The Heartsounds project is an exchange scheme that arranges for UK and Ugandan nurses and other staff to visit and learn from each other’s countries and to improve services in both nations as a result.

The NHS is trying to involve service users in developing and improving services. ‘When we visited Uganda for the first time, we found mental health services were heavily under-resourced and only just beginning to explore the notion of user involvement,’ said Cerdic, who works at East London NHS Foundation Trust.

‘On the other hand, one of the country’s strengths is its culture of dealing with social issues at a local level, a feature that the NHS could learn from.’

So far, the project has involved several exchange visits, and a jointly organised conference; a peer support network for service users is now in operation in Uganda; and patients are being asked about their mental state and social wellbeing before and after treatment.

Cerdic told the judges that he plans to improve staff resilience to help nurses support patients better. ‘We found that staff felt safer at work when the patients were not being hit,’ he said.

‘In the longer term, I would like to involve the Ugandan diaspora in the UK in our vision of service user involvement – which can be something of a myth, even in the UK.’

The specialist judge said: ‘There are many lessons to learn from this visionary work’ NS

Stroke care teacher

Colleen Lloyd introduced a ‘train the trainer’ scheme in Ghana

A team led by Colleen Lloyd, senior staff nurse at Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust, is commended for its role in the Wessex/Ghana Stroke Partnership project. The five nurses taught core stroke nursing skills to nursing staff at the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra. As a result, the swallowing and continence needs of all stroke patients in the hospital are now assessed and patients are positioned correctly. Some essential equipment has been purchased and stroke care is now regarded as a speciality worthy of investment.