



## Guest blog - supporting adult mental health patients and carers to shape services

This month Rebecca Lambert and Nirusha Nicholas of South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Foundation Trust describe their work in engaging the community in shaping adult mental health services and supporting each other.

South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Foundation Trust, believe the best way to improve services is to listen to service users and carers and involve them in developing services that are meaningful to them.

Within the Older Adults Mental Health and Dementia (MHOAD) Clinical Academic Group (CAG) we have a very active Service User and Carer Advisory Group – known as SUCAG.

SUCAG is a fun dynamic group of older adult service users and carers who have had direct experience of using or caring for someone who has used SLaM services. They work closely with the involvement team and staff to improve services and ensure the voices of service users and carers are listened to, heard and acted on.

Most importantly members of the group support each other, but their input into our services is really valuable. SUCAG are involved in; inspecting services, recruitment of new staff, organising events and social activities, reviewing and commenting on new policies and procedures, giving advice on service development, presenting at local events on matters that affect service users and carers.

The involvement team within MHOAD support SUCAG members by providing training events to throughout the year and facilitate regular meetings and social events.

Doreen Bryant, SUCAG member, says:

“We have made a difference. Perhaps the obvious one being the change in the relationship between us, the users, and providers. We are consulted and our opinions considered and respected. On our part we have gained insight into the inner workings of SLaM and the day-to-day difficulties faced by the providers. This two way communication can only be good.”

People who are known to SLaM services or care for someone who is, can get involved by contacting the involvement team lead:

[nula.conlan@slam@nhs.uk](mailto:nula.conlan@slam@nhs.uk).

An additional branch of SUCAG is If Only I’d Known: Caring for someone with dementia. Set up by members of SUCAG who cared for their loved ones, they realised there was a lot of valuable information, hints and tips that they learned while caring, that they wish they had known at the time. They developed seven workshops co-produced by carers and ex-carers, working alongside clinical staff from SLaM older adult services.

These sessions cover:

Talking about dementia

Dealing with social care

Health of the person with dementia - physical

Health of the person with dementia - emotional

Care for the carer

The legal side of things

Assistive technology

Anyone who cares for someone who has received a diagnosis of dementia is welcome. GP’s can also get more information to inform their patients and make a referral to If Only I’d Known by contacting [nirusha.nicholas@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:nirusha.nicholas@slam.nhs.uk).