

NEWS

Sir Bobby helps to promote football-inspired group therapy

By Christian Duffin

Football legend Sir Bobby Charlton has asked a community psychiatric nurse to give Manchester United fans help in beating depression and suicidal feelings.

Sir Bobby is so impressed with Pete Sayers' work with mental health patients at Macclesfield Town Football Club's ground that he wants him to run a similar scheme at United's Old Trafford stadium.

Mr Sayers uses football analogies in group therapy sessions, comparing the challenges faced by players to those encountered by patients experiencing mental anxiety.

The group discusses how goalkeepers can feel isolated if they are not helped by team-mates, and the way midfielders need to communicate well to be effective.

GPs, social workers, families and friends refer patients. The *It's a Goal!* scheme is aimed at 16 to 35-year-old men, a social group that tends to avoid addressing health issues and has high suicide rates. Women and



Psychiatric nurse Pete Sayers has impressed Sir Bobby Charlton (right) with his work

non-football fans are also welcome. There are 11 weekly sessions in a 'season' for between six and ten people. 'Men in the 16-35 age group are four times as likely to kill themselves as anyone else,' said Mr Sayers. 'Men internalise their

problems and have less control when they finally bubble over. We encourage men to talk about their problems using the magic of football as a spark.'

Sir Bobby launched the Macclesfield Town scheme in 2004 through social entrepreneur Malcolm McLean and the Laureus charity, which promotes sport worldwide.

Feedback from patients has been good, with a third finding a job afterwards and 97 per cent saying they would recommend the scheme to others.

Alan Pringle, a lecturer in mental health nursing at the University of Nottingham, who oversees the project, said: 'A scheme such as this means that some people do not have to go into hospital.'

A Manchester United spokesperson said Sir Bobby, a club director, is keen to start the project. Mr Sayers hopes to hold the first sessions in the next two or three months.

Depression guidance aims to streamline care

Best practice guidelines on treating depression across the NHS are being finalised. They will cover everyone from practice nurses and health visitors in primary care to crisis teams helping inpatients at risk of suicide.

Mental health experts, including nurses, have devised the electronic guidelines. They will be part of the Connecting for Health information technology system, which links computers at 30,000 GP surgeries to primary care trusts and 300 hospitals across England.

Nurses will have a special interest in areas such as patients' sleep deprivation or dietary needs, plus the difficult task of discussing patients' suicidal feelings.

Other sections relate to screening protocols, the importance of physical exercise and discharge planning.

Options for cognitive behavioural therapy and antidepressant medication are also discussed.

'We can illustrate the journey from first symptoms to recovery'

All mental health workers are expected to use the system when it is introduced within the next three months.

South Staffordshire Healthcare NHS Trust spearheaded the project with funding from the Department of Health's

(DH) *Do Once and Share* scheme. Trust nurses, the DH, the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health charity and other interest groups were involved in generating ideas.

Nurse Joe Wall, the trust's project manager, said: 'By bringing together this experience on depression, we can illustrate the journey a patient may take from first experiencing symptoms through to recovery.'

'Having a national approach will ensure that all patients gain access to the most effective, efficient and simplified package of care.'

The initiative does not cover depression among older people and children, or the treatment of manic depression.

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