

From there to here – the history and span of Adult Mental Health Social Work.

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Walter Disney

- “It is not the days in life we remember, rather the moments.”

From the 1970s to the 2020s and how our social work world has changed.

- Social Workers were very thin on the ground in the 1970s.
- Practically a new profession with little legislation to work from across all service areas.
- Exciting times, a new frontier.
- The IASW was newly established and when I joined in 1979 shared an office in Liberty Hall and only open in the mornings.

Social Work in the 1970s

- Entry level to social work was a B.SocSc
- Exceptions : Professional Qualification were required for Psychiatric and Medical Social Workers – the key stakeholders in the formation of the IASW
- Professional Qualification: CQSW awarded on completion of a approved course by CCETSW in the UK
- Up to the mid 1980s only two courses – postgrad in UCD and 4 year undergraduate in TCD

1970S

Limited legislative framework:

Mental Treatment Act 1945

Children's Act of 1908

New social legislations started to filter down strongly
influenced by our membership of the EEC:

Legal Aid Board

Women allowed to claim certain social welfare payments

The place of social work

- Lack of clarity of our roles
- “Social problems did not exist in Limerick until we started to recruit social workers” MOH, Health Board!
- Written directive to all social workers in the Mid West – social workers were not to refer anyone to family planning clinics as that was a medical issue!

University Placement -1985

- Our Lady's Hospital, Ennis.
- Commonly known back then as “Lunatic Asylum”
- Providing all Mental Health Care for Co Clare
- 700 inpatients plus a community service.
- Community Service – 2 CPNs (1 male and 1 female) and one social worker who worked with both inpatients and in the community.

Planning for the Future 1984

- First National Mental Health Policy
- Planning Group
- Recommendations:
- The closure of the Psychiatric Hospitals to be replaced by Acute Units in General Hospitals.
- The rehabilitation of long stay patients
- The move to community focused MDTs based in specific Sectors of populations (20 -30,000 pop)
- Transfer of long stay patients from asylums to High, Medium and Low support hostels in the community with a focus on relocation of nursing staff.

Planning for the Future 1984

- Recommended the recruitment of social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists and “Alcoholic” Counsellors.
- No suggestions on roles, structures management etc.
- Radical proposals at the time but still saw everything through medical paradigm reflecting the lack of holistic thinking around mental health.

Development of MD community services

- Social workers were very thin on the ground.
- No expansion of social work numbers until the mid to late 1990s
- In 1992 there were 40 social workers nationally in Adult Mental Health services (8 of whom were in Private Hospitals)
- CAMHS were worse off. Two services in the country . One in Galway (Western Health Board) and one in Dublin (St John of Gods)

Legislative Framework

- Mental Treatment Act 1945
- A radical change of approach
- What was the world like in 1945?
- What was the services like then?
- Three categories: Voluntary (Blue Form), Temporary (Pink Form) and PUM (White Form)
- No definition of a mental disorder in the Act. People viewed as vulnerable or at risk in society could be detained indefinitely as PUM patients
- Temporary Patients reviewed by treating consultant every 6 months for a maximum of 2 years
- No independent review of detention orders
- Inspector of Mental Hospitals
- Ewing Goffman's Asylums explains it all!
- European Convention of Human Rights, 1950

Pressure for Change

- European Convention of Human Rights
- Improvement of medical treatments
- Costs of running large asylums
- International Best Practice
- Growth internationally in the interest of human rights
- European Courts of Justice – 3 cases from Ireland
- New Mental Health Legislation signed into law in the 1980s but never implemented as viewed to be still in breach of ECHR

Move to the MHA, 2001

- Green Paper on Mental Health 1992
- Looked at international and national trends in the treatment of mental health and the need for new legislation and key points
- Court granted Supervision Orders for vulnerable service users in the community, a role for medics and social workers
- Intensive involvement by social work through SWIP

Move to the MHA, 2001

- White Paper A New Mental Health Act, 1995
- Narrowed down the proposals that would be included in a new Mental Health Act
- Adult Care Orders, based on the model of Child Care Orders to be included in the new Act replacing the suggestion of Supervision Orders and social workers would have a central role in their application to the Courts and in their implementation.

Vision for Change 2006

- Compared to Planning for the Future there was considerable social work and peer and family input into the policy.
- Reflected in the recommendations around the expanded numbers of social workers in the CMHTs, area and regional teams.
- A template to expand the numbers of social workers across teams and to bench mark services
- Recovery focus, many social workers had been focusing their work on that previously often in lonely furrows.

We got there finally! MHA 2001

- Legal definition of Mental Disorder
- Protection of rights of involuntary patients
- Authorised Officers
- Mental Health Commission
- Certain limitations:
- Not as comprehensive
- What about vulnerable vol patients
- Community services
- Compliance with the ADM Act

Regulation – Friend or Foe for social work?

- Mental Health Commission
- Coru
- Impact on social work practice?

Roll and out of specialist team/services, opportunities for SW

- New and expanding specialist teams
- National Clinical Programmes
- Specialist rolls open to social work: Authorised Officers, BFT, DBT, Family Therapy etc etc
- Mental Health in Primary Care!!

Opportunities for Mental Health SW ahead

- The ADM Act
- The draft National Safeguarding Policy (Safeguarding Legislation?)
- The (new) Mental Health Act
- Out of hours teams
- Crisis Resolution Teams

The Future Looks Bright!

- “Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.”

Warren Buffett

Is it time to start planting more trees for future mental health social workers?