

INEQUALITIES

Think positive about therapies

A programme to improve access to psychological care is reaching into BME communities, reports Stuart Shepherd

The *Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Positive Practice Guide* makes it clear that anybody accessing mental health services faces potential barriers. Ethnicity, culture, faith or language may all place additional barriers in the way of people from black and minority ethnic communities.

As part of the improving access programme for these therapies, several demonstration, pathfinder and "second wave" sites have developed approaches that have begun to remove the barriers and show positive outcomes in the treatment of depression and anxiety among BME groups.

The London borough of Newham has a 66 per cent BME population and is the most ethnically diverse borough in the country. Meeting the psychological needs of communities from South Asia, Eastern Europe, the Baltic States and other regions around the globe presents the programme demonstration site team working at **NHS Newham** with a genuine challenge.

Nonetheless it now successfully provides a flexible and evolving service responsive to a range of language, faith and cultural needs (see box).

"We realise many people who have not been accessing our

psychological services take their concerns related to anxiety or depression to their local religious leaders," says interim service manager Julia Doe. "So we have been meeting with representatives from the local mosques and, through one of our senior therapists who speaks several community languages, have been explaining what services we can offer. The mosques have become a conduit for referrals to us."

Local publicity

These steps have been backed up with interviews on local community radio stations and an article in the monthly local authority magazine.

Ms Doe continues: "We have also worked hard with religious leaders to overcome the stigma associated with mental illness. The results have been good and we have started to offer evening and Sunday clinics specifically for BME clients as a response to the increased uptake."

In a borough with a BME population of over 70 per cent, **NHS Ealing's** pathfinder site has increased its referrals from BME groups by 40 per cent. In the opinion mental health wellbeing service head Baljeet Ruprah-Shah, two things have particularly influenced this – a team of experienced practitioners

who share cultural identity with the communities they serve and a huge publicity campaign.

"Having therapists who speak the same language and observe the same religious rites as their patients is good but it's not the whole answer," says Ms Ruprah-Shah. "Not all of our Punjabi speaking female clients for instance want to be seen by a practitioner from the same background.

"Within our team, however, we can share our insights into a wide range of cultural complexities and make sure that client is seen by someone who

BETTER ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES

Rise in BME proportion of therapy referrals in Newham

