A BMA vision for mental health

1. There should be parity of esteem between physical and mental health services
   Mental health should be valued and prioritised as much as physical health. Based on the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ definition of parity of esteem,1 a parity approach aims to deliver, to the same degree as physical health care:

| Equal access to effective, safe care | Patients with mental health problems should be able to access effective, safe care as much as those with physical health problems. Care should be delivered close to home and in a timely manner. |
| Equal efforts to improve the quality of care | There should be equal commitment to improving the quality of mental health services as there is to improving physical health services, particularly when there are visible problems with the services. This includes strict targets to reduce the waiting time for care, especially for psychological therapies. There should be equal efforts to collect data to see where improvements can be made. |
| Enough resource to meet demand | Services should be adequate in all parts of the country to meet the needs of the local population and provide safe, effective and humane care. |
| Equal status within healthcare education and practice | Mental health should be taught proportionally to the demand for mental health care, and receive adequate funding to support this. |
| Equally high aspirations for patients | Patients should be able to expect more from mental health services, and there should be equally high aspirations from the service providers. This will be due to the services being of the same quality as physical health services. |
| Equal efforts to measure outcomes | Mental health service providers should make equal efforts to measure the outcomes of their services for patients, in order to make necessary improvements. |

---

2. **Doctors and all health professionals should be in the best position possible to take care of people with mental health problems**

Through appropriate training, all doctors should have a good understanding of mental health. General practitioners manage the majority of mental health problems (85%)\(^2\) so they should have a particularly strong grounding in mental health. This should be supported through action to provide manageable workloads and enough time in consultations to manage their patient’s mental health problems appropriately.

The psychiatry profession should be advocated in medical schools, to help support a fully staffed workforce. Psychiatrists should have adequate training on the physical, as well as the psychological aspects of mental health care provision, in order to provide holistic care.

All health professionals – such as nurses, midwives, health visitors and health care assistants – should be adequately trained in mental health problems.

3. **People with mental health problems receive optimal care, such that they are able to recover or improve their condition and have a better quality of life**

This should include:

- **Having a range of evidence-based services available**
  
  Patients with mental health problems should be able to choose from a range of available services to suit their particular needs, where they have capacity. These services must be based on strong evidence that they are effective in helping people to recover or improve. This must involve adequate research and investment in exploring effective treatments.

- **Having quick access to services**
  
  Patients should not have to wait longer than the waiting time target to access the service they need, so that their condition does not worsen.

- **Being able to lead their own recoveries and be involved in their treatment**
  
  Good mental health care is always a joint venture with patients and families and this should continue to be prioritised.

- **Not feeling stigmatised by those involved in their care**
  
  Patients should not feel stigmatised by any health professionals, or other patients within the health care system.

- **Having holistic, integrated care and a clear pathway from first access to recovery**
  
  Patients should expect to receive holistic care; for example, care that takes account of the mental and physical aspects of their condition, and treats them as a ‘whole person.’ This requires mental health services to be fully integrated with physical health services, between primary and secondary mental health services and between health and social care services. By having integrated care, patients should be able to have a clear, logical and coordinated care pathway from start to finish. For example, they should not have to repeat their story or medical history several times to different health professionals.

---