Act Your Way to Good Mental Health

Posted on Thursday 11th October 2007

This week (October 9th) a major conference run by the University of Birmingham will look at how theatre and performance can help tackle mental health problems.

Play it Better is a one day conference at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre run in partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health. The event will particularly focus on the impact of cultural and language barriers in mental health care, which is the theme of this year's World Mental Health Day on October 10th.

The centrepiece of the day will be a free performance open to the general public of Revolving Door an award winning play, which addresses the issues of suicide amongst young men.

Revolving Door tells the story of a coroner's inquest into the suicide of a young man called Martin. He calls a GP, a hospital nurse and Martin's mother as witnesses and reflects on why Martin took his own life.

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Conference organiser Anne de la Croix from the University's Department of Primary Care comments: "Mental health professionals rely heavily on communication skills to get the information they need to diagnose and help their patients. This is often made more difficult because many patients find it very hard to communicate their problems.

We hope the conference will show how theatre can overcome the cultural and language barriers in mental health care that occur in a multi-cultural city like Birmingham. So the day includes a key session run by trainers from the University which uses bi-lingual role players to explore ways of dealing with mental health consultations when patients have to speak through an interpreter."

The afternoon workshops include interactive role-play sessions using a method of communication developed in the Netherlands in which the four elements water, earth, fire and air represent different styles of communicating and how this can be used to help make patients feel more comfortable. The Birmingham Institute of Psychodrama will also be demonstrating how drama therapy can be used to work with groups.

Polly Wright director of the HEARTH centre and writer of Revolving Door adds: "Although theatre in education has been used since the 1960's, there has been a recent explosion of interest in how drama can be used in a mental health setting.

Taking "Revolving Door" on tour around Northern Ireland, there was a tremendously positive response about the way it deals with an issue, which many young men struggle to discuss openly. Three-quarters of the young people who saw the performance as part of Rethink's anti stigma campaign said it had changed how they thought about mental health."

For further information or to request interviews contact: Ben Hill, Press Officer, Tel 0121 4145134, Mob 07789 921 163 – professional photographs of the cast performing Revolving Door will be available on request. Journalists and members of the public are very welcome to attend the public performance of Revolving Door.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

The Play it Better Conference is supported by the Centre for Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health, the Collaborative Research Network in Human Communication and the Care Services Improvement Partnership.

The Play it Better Conference

Play it Better is a conference meant for academics, actors, (medical) teachers, psychotherapists, doctors, mental health service users, trainers, directors, playwrights, psychiatrists, students and anyone else interested in applied theatre, mental health and communication skills.

For more information visit the website: www.playitbetter.bham.ac.uk

Talks

Professor John Skelton - professor of Clinical Communication, director of the Interactive Skills Unit, and associate dean at Birmingham Medical School. John will officially open the conference.

Professor Femi Oyebode - head of the department of Psychiatry at Birmingham University. He will discuss how culture can impact mental health (care) and how theatre techniques can be applied in the field of mental health.

Inna van den Hogen - director of Theater in Bedrijf, an applied theatre company based in Amsterdam. Inna will show delegates how forum theatre works, and will start a discussion on the theme of the day: the impact of culture on mental health.

Workshops

Clark Baim - co-course leader at the Birmingham Institute for Psychodrama and registered psychodramatist. Clark will introduce delegates to psychodrama, a holistic method of psychotherapy in which people are helped to actively explore situations from their life, past, present and future.

Jackie Beavan, Polly Wright and Anne de la Croix. Polly and Jackie will take you to a foreign practice to reflect on different ways of dealing with linguistic and cultural differences in the mental health consultation.

Vera Boots - long time associate of actor, director and head of Stichting Studio 5. Helmert has developed a method in which the four elements water, earth, fire and air represent different styles of communicating. Vera will train the delegates to work with these elements.

The Centre for Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health

The overall strategy of The Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health (CEIMH) is to promote excellence and innovation in the delivery of good interdisciplinary mental health teaching and learning. Building on the University of Birmingham's established record in mental health education, CEIMH aims to develop a dynamic and collaborative partnership between six disciplines within the University as well as other key local, national and international mental health agencies and service user and carer organisations.

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