**Student mental health study highlights gaps in provision**

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**A national campaign has launched calling on the Department of Health to respond to a new report assessing the impact university transitions have on student mental health.**

Today, at the beginning of Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2014, the UK's student mental health charity, Student Minds, has released a report, 'University Challenge: Integrating Care for Eating Disorders at Home and at University’. The report reveals that the provision of care for students with eating disorders does not meet the requirements set out by the white paper ‘Putting People First’ and shows that the inadequate care stems from a system which is not adapted to the transient nature of student life and does not cater to the specific needs of students. This is in spite of the high prevalence of mental health problems amongst university students, with one in four experiencing clinical levels of distress.

For students in need of access to services, support between home and university needs to be joined up. Early and continuous support is the best way to ensure that a student’s condition does not deteriorate. All too often, the lack of appropriate support means that students drop out of university and lose out on the opportunities that they have been given. Of the professionals surveyed, 96% felt that students do not get specialist care as quickly as they would like and the average wait for an appointment with a specialist service is 5 months.

According to Professor Janet Treasure, Student Minds Trustee and a consultant psychiatrist who has specialised in the treatment of eating disorders for more than 20 years, ‘There is a clear need to have a coherent care pathway within the NHS for conditions that have a prolonged time course to help young people through the numerous transitions that they face’.

Dr. Nicola Byrom, Founding Director of Student Minds, said ‘The Royal College of Psychiatrists called for NHS providers to recognise and respond to the particular mental health needs of the student population and the difficulties many experience in gaining equal access to services in 2011. Student Minds' research indicates that this isn’t happening fast enough. Whilst there are some great examples of best practice, a postcode lottery for student support exists and students in many parts of the UK are facing particular problems in accessing support services. A key problem is that NHS commissioners often do not take the specific needs of students into account when funding services. We have spoken to a number of Clinical Commissioning Groups that welcome further input in this area and are enthusiastic about improving student access to support, but central action and support from the Department of Health is necessary to help commissioners access the resources they need to make changes.'

Student Minds is calling on the Department of Health to support the development of best practice guidelines on this issue in collaboration with Clinical Commissioning Groups so that across the UK all students have access to consistent care pathways catered to their needs.

Individuals can support the campaign by signing a [petition](https://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/doh-address-the-student-mental-health-support-gap), which will be presented to Norman Lamb at a meeting about student mental health on the 13th March. More information about the campaign can be found [here](http://www.studentminds.org.uk/transitions-campaign.html).

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*Student Minds is the UK’s student mental health charity. We believe that peer interventions can change the state of student mental health. We deliver research–driven training and support to equip students to bring about positive change on their campuses through campaigning and facilitating peer support programmes.*