



# State of Mental Health Services

Amicus survey, August 2006



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## Executive Summary

- Results from the Amicus survey of its reps and members who work in mental health services identified a high degree of cuts in mental health services taking place due to financial pressures.
- This reduction in mental health services is happening with little or no involvement and consultation with staff, who feel that clinical practice is being affected.

## Introduction

Amicus carried out the **Mental Health NHS Services Survey** to determine the impact of financial pressures on mental health services after hearing unprecedented reports of service and job cuts within Mental Health NHS Trusts and services across England.

Amicus surveyed its reps and members who work in NHS mental health services<sup>1</sup>. Our results show that there is a reduction in the level of mental health service provision, with a high degree of service and job cuts taking place or being planned. The impact of these cuts will be felt by the most vulnerable sections of society. Further, this is occurring with little involvement or consultation with the practitioners and staff who work in these crucial services.

## Survey Results

### Trust Deficits, Service and Job Cuts

Amicus is greatly concerned by the picture that emerged from our survey results. Nearly three quarters (71%) of Trusts in the survey were in deficit with;

- **56% of Trusts proposing service cuts,**
- **Over two out of five (43%) Trusts proposing job cuts.**

One respondent stated that although their Mental Health Trust had broken even this year, it was thought the Trust would be in deficit next year, and job cuts had been proposed. A further reply said their Mental Health Trust had broken even this year, but this was as a result of closing units.

When we asked respondents about their particular department and services,

- **28% replied that there were proposals to cut services within their department,**
- **Over one in five (22%) respondents said there were proposed job cuts in their department.**

Additionally, one respondent was still waiting to hear if there would be service and/or job cuts, and two others indicated that services and jobs in their department may be vulnerable. One replied that although there were no proposals for service or job cuts to their department this year,

*"...last year we were asked if we could cut our service or be axed altogether. I had to write a report to argue our case and, [we are] still under scrutiny..."*

Amicus also received examples of some of the cuts in services that are taking place or being planned. These include;

- Closures of an eating disorder service, children's in-patient service, an adolescent unit and acute wards,
- Reductions and lost posts in child psychology, community teams, day hospitals, young and older person's services and substance abuse programmes.

In addition, there are also adult specialist posts under threat.

This adds to the growing evidence<sup>2</sup> that mental health services are being hit hard by the financial pressures on the NHS.

**Mental health services should not be seen as 'soft targets' for cuts by cash-strapped Trusts because of the stigma attached to mental health difficulties.**

### Lack of Staff Consultation and Frozen Training

Motivated, respected and fairly paid staff are crucial to delivering and developing quality public services. Bodies such as the National Consumer Council recognise the need for valuing public service staff to building high quality public services<sup>3</sup>. Yet, worryingly **over a third of respondents to the Amicus survey did not know whether there were going to be cuts in jobs within their own service.** This raises serious concerns about the levels of consultation and involvement of staff and practitioners in the decision making process.

Further, in 16% of cases training budgets are being severely cut or frozen altogether.

This level of uncertainty and a lack of developmental training will clearly damage the morale of staff working in mental health services and their ability to plan the future of their services. This is likely to add to the problems of staff retention that exist within the NHS and put the future development and expansion of mental health services in jeopardy.

### Further Reductions in Mental Health Provision

By themselves the statistics regarding service and job cuts do not paint the full picture of the reduction in mental health service provision. In addition measures such as freezing jobs and vacancies are being put in place. It was found that there are frozen posts in 49% of Trusts with financial pressures being cited as the reason in 90% of these cases. A further reply explained that their Trust had no frozen posts, as vacancies simply became 'no posts' rather than being frozen. At a service level, 30% of the practitioners who responded said that there were vacancies within their service. A third said there were frozen posts within their service.

Replies to the survey also cited examples of fixed term contracts not being renewed and staff who leave or retire not being replaced – both of which effectively represent a decrease in service provision.

The reduction in the level of mental health provision that is occurring - and the impact on the quality of remaining services which will inevitably be placed under greater strain - will be hugely detrimental to some of the most vulnerable sections of society. Adults and children will face greater obstacles in accessing the mental healthcare they require, doubtlessly increasing levels of social exclusion for people with mental health difficulties.

### Equality Impact Assessments

When 'equality impact assessments' were raised only 7% were able to confirm an assessment had definitely taken place. This raises concerns about involvement and consultation of staff in such assessments, if they are taking place. In one instance where there was an impact assessment conducted the outcomes were,

*"...substantial for some services but this did not make any difference...[we are] easy to cut so are being cut"*

### The Impact on Clinical Practice

Finally, in light of the information above we asked people if they thought that clinical practice was being affected, with two-thirds saying that 'Yes' they believed it was, and one reply simply saying 'Not yet'.

## Conclusion

The Amicus survey results show a high degree of cuts in mental health services taking place due to financial pressures. This all runs counter to the Government's stated aims. The Department of Health's own research found that people's second health priority is to focus on mental well-being<sup>4</sup>, and the Government vowed to "continue to invest in and improve our services for people with mental health problems"<sup>5</sup>.

**The Government cannot continue to ignore that its NHS funding policies are resulting in a decline in the provision of mental health services.**

**Mental health services across the country must receive sufficient funding in order that quality mental health services can be provided and the needs of society's most vulnerable people can be met.**

## What you can do

**Lobby and write to your local MP**, explaining you are concerned about the reduction in mental health services taking place, citing the Amicus survey to support your argument.

**Contact your local authority and local councillors.** Local authorities have Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which include local councillors. Any significant reductions in services in your local area should be discussed here. If there are reductions, lobby and write to committee members and local councillors and if possible attend the meeting where it will be discussed. Again, use this survey and our findings to help support your argument.

**Contact your Amicus Regional Office**, they will have the contact details for Amicus branches in mental health services in your local area and may know of local activities that are taking place to oppose reductions that you can help support.

**Join Amicus** – if you work in healthcare and are not yet an Amicus member then you can join online at [www.amicustheunion.org](http://www.amicustheunion.org)

For further information on this report please contact Siân Errington, [sian.errington@amicustheunion.org](mailto:sian.errington@amicustheunion.org)

## Appendix 1: About the Survey

Those surveyed were Amicus reps and members who work in NHS mental health services. The survey was publicised through 'RepsDirect' – the electronic newsletter that is sent to all Amicus health sector reps – and through the mailing list of the British Association of Arts Therapists (BAAT).

There were 67 responses in total from 41 different Trusts across the country.

Responses were from practitioners operating in a variety of areas and represented 64 separate departments and services within mental health provision.

1. Full details about the survey can be found at the end of the report, Appendix 1  
 2. 'A Cut Too Far: a rethink report into budget cuts affecting mental health services', May 2006 and 'Under Pressure: The finances of Mental Health Trusts in 2006', The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, July 2006.  
 3. 'A Playlist for Public Services', National Consumer Council, August 2005

4. 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say', Department of Health, January 2006, page 32  
 5. 'Labour Party 2005 General Election manifesto, page 64