



Case Study

Self-harm - Case Study 2

THE Samaritans made a woman with Asperger's who was suffering from a low frame of mind feel as if she was finally receiving help.

Ms X had been taken by ambulance to the Emergency Department at the Royal Cornwall Hospital on four consecutive days in February 2015 - she has regularly attended the emergency room since 2002.

On the first day she was feeling "really low" and had turned up at a Cornwall Partnership Foundation Trust Cornwall Mental Health Team (CMHT) office in Truro. She said she was desperate for help but was told "you can't just turn up here".

This made Ms X think she wasn't being listened to and that no one cared.

"I had a week of trying all the right ways to get help but it didn't work so I tried the wrong ways, meaning drinking and taking tranquilisers.

"I called everyone for help - friends, family, CMHT but it was the Samaritans who were really helpful - it seemed like they were really passionate about what they do and they called an ambulance", she explained.

"At the emergency department I've been left under a blanket in a hallway, left on a floor behind a curtain and once barricaded by two security men in the family room who said I was drunk and I could go home when I could walk straight - I was labelled as aggressive.

"I have Asperger's so can't stand brightly lit rooms, it makes me anxious but I was left in a brightly lit room for eight hours."

Ms X complained about the lights but said that no one took any notice. She then explained a nurse had come to see her, telling her he had read her file and knew she was aggressive.

"His attitude was so bad I ripped out the IV and discharged myself."

A report from the hospital and police has been sent to Ms X to explain that due to her aggressive behaviour she could not use the Emergency Department again.

"I know I swore at staff because I was frightened. There is no understanding of what people are like in a mental health crisis. I eventually spoke to a policewoman and I explained why I swore at staff - I was sent home in the middle of the night to walk home alone and the policewoman agreed it was understandable I swore at staff under these circumstances."

Ms X explained she had felt "petrified" because of how she had been treated and that she felt like a nuisance.

"I even got told off for going to the loo by myself and felt really embarrassed."

Ms X said she continued to take medication as staff had not checked her bag, and that she had been left alone near a sharps bin, which she said she could easily open and that was "ideal for someone wanting to cut themselves".



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Her experiences include being sent home at 2am in a taxi after which she “carried on drinking and taking tablets” as well as having to fight for £2.50 to get a bus home after she had been on a drip for several hours. “They expected me to walk home at night on my own.”

Following each incidence, Ms X had discharged herself because she felt she was being treated very poorly. She said her Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) had visited on the fifth occasion as her friend had contacted her, but said the CPN just told her friend to take the pills away. “I live alone so my friend couldn’t be there all the time. I had no more contact from anyone until 2-3 weeks later.”

In December Ms X had had a psychiatric assessment and said the Psychiatric Liaison Nurse (PLN) was “really nice” but she hadn’t seen her again. Ms X also went to her GP, who she describes as “amazing” and that the contact with her GP and the PLN was very positive and helped her to get better that time. “They had time for me, talked with me and listened,” she added.

Ms X would like to see support improve and feels that making the patient feel cared for is vital and if nurses had been more caring and compassionate she may have got better more quickly.

“It’s good to feel someone cares and thinks you’re worthwhile.”

She also said that nurses need mental health training as people under the influence of alcohol are not necessarily just drunk, that there needs to be a quiet area in the Emergency Department, less bright lighting, and a separate ward for people who may have self-harmed.

Her ideas also include improvements to information sharing, referrals to support services such as Addaction, not allowing you to go home alone, proactive follow-ups to be made and that using the Police can make people with mental health issues very scared.

Ms X also said she has had conflicting advice from two medical professionals, with her CPN telling her she could have psychotherapy but only if she disengaged from a rape and sexual abuse service while her psychotherapist said it was okay to continue to access this service.

She also added that she was diagnosed with Asperger’s in 2015 but has not been offered any support since.