

Introduction

This report is the first annual report, encompassing the work of REFOCUS throughout 2015. It follows on from the inaugural report which covered all of REFOCUS activity from its inception in 2011 all the way through 2014. REFOCUS has continued to thrive and is considered to be an invaluable resource within the College as is evident in this report.

History and membership of REFOCUS

REFOCUS, although not bearing that name at the time, was conceived by the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland as a forum where the views and experiences of service users and family members/carers would inform and influence all aspects of the College's business and, in particular, the training experience of young future psychiatrists. It was modelled on a similar forum established by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the United Kingdom – SURF Service User Recovery Forum – which has been in operation in the United Kingdom for a few years now since 2006. John Dixon, a former SURF member, provided great insight for initiating REFOCUS.

For those not familiar with REFOCUS, the title for the group may seem somewhat puzzling. REFOCUS stands for Recovery Experience Forum of Carers and Users of the Services, reflecting the strong belief of the forum in the wellness and recovery philosophy. After some debate and some interesting suggestions, the group adopted REFOCUS as its name, reflecting the view that what concerned us was the need to inform the College and its various committees and training programmes, not only about the service user and family member/carer experience of the Mental Health Services in Ireland, but also suggestions for change and improvement. The idea of "refocusing" seemed to capture this objective perfectly.



Dr Larkin Feeney and Ms Jeanine Webster at CPsychI Summer School

"Caring for someone with a mental health issue can feel a very lonely experience and support groups, with other people in the same situation, are a lifesaver"



UCD MedFest- REFOCUS member Julie Healy is 2nd from right

"The recovery journey needs to involve a person having total love for a person, there can be no holding back in terms of what you would do for them"



Niamh Mongey and Julie Healy - Medfest 2015

Governance and Housekeeping

REFOCUS has continued using and reviewing the terms of reference established by the group with the assistance of an external facilitator. The group has also held firm on its early decision that all members of the forum would participate on an equal basis and there would be no sub group split into service user and family members/carers of the group. The minutes of every meeting are recorded and presented by the joint chairs to the Director of Communications & Public Education, Dr John Hillery.

Presentations made to REFOCUS

From its inception, the forum felt that it would be helpful if psychiatrists, including trainee psychiatrists, from the College membership presented to the group, about various psychiatric specialities and/or services in Ireland today with the aim of informing and educating REFOCUS members about the profession, how they operate within the system, mental health teams and so forth.

As a result, we have had a number of very useful and informative talks. In May, we welcomed Dr Maeve Doyle, former Chair of the Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry to present to the group. Dr Doyle gave an overview of the work of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and the differences and challenges it presents in comparison to the Adult Psychiatric Services.

In December, we were treated to a very informative and encouraging presentation from the Dean of Education, Prof Greg Swanwick on postgraduate training within the College, the HSE and beyond. The group discussed further suggested practical involvement and engagement with trainees all of which will be explored in more depth in 2016 but which also gave hope to REFOCUS in terms of achieving one of its main objectives as outlined earlier.



Presentations made by members of REFOCUS

REFOCUS members presented their own work and experience at a number of events throughout the year, most noticeably through their work with Postgraduate Training. Kara Madden and Jeanine Webster presented at the College Summer Schools in Cork and Dublin and were considered a highlight of the events. Brian McNulty and Dr Anne Jeffers presented at a GROW conference where Brian's book was also very well received.

2015 saw the first inaugural "Walk and Talk with Psychiatrists" in partnership with See Change. Joint Chair, Liam Hennessy represented the group by speaking on "The importance of Service Users and Carers working in partnership with Psychiatrists". The event was attended by both medical professionals and the general public and Liam's presentation was very well received.

Julie Healy also took part as a panel member giving carer experience at the hugely successful Medfest event in UCD. Medfest is the medically themed one night film festival, exploring medicine and psychiatry. The theme for MedFest 2015 was "Global Medicine and Civilisations".

An obvious follow on to the preparation of papers by REFOCUS was the presentation of such papers to the College and its members. As a result, members of REFOCUS made presentations in workshops and at various conferences. It appears that these presentations were well received although, being given to workshops, it meant that they "competed" with other presentations and did not reach as wide an audience as might have been wished. This is an issue the forum hopes to address in future.



Brian McNulty & Dr Anne Jeffers on TV3's Ireland AM

"Non Judgemental communication is so important"

REFOCUS member Liam Hennessy (2nd from right) with other speakers at CPsychI Walk and Talk 2015



"Recovery from these and other mental health difficulties is very possible. I am very well now."

Julie Healy on Medfest 2015 Panel (2nd from right)

Papers written by REFOCUS

2015 was a busy year for REFOCUS with regard to writing papers. The group produced a final draft of the perspective paper "Understanding ECT" for the College Council. This informative paper addresses the common fears that service users and family members have about ECT. The paper aims to dispel many of the myths surrounding ECT.

REFOCUS have commenced work on two new papers in 2015. These papers, with the working titles "Spirituality in Psychiatry" and "Family Dynamics", were borne out of in depth discussion at the REFOCUS quarterly meetings of areas and issues to highlight to trainees and consultants and in doing so raise awareness of their importance to service users/patients, family members /carers. As with all papers that REFOCUS have produced, the forum have and will involve the College membership in research and writing through the College processes and pathway for any College paper.

"Being a carer brings the utmost pain. It also brings the utmost love."

Brian on TV3



Brian McNulty EXPERIENCED BIPOLAR DISORDER

Involvement of REFOCUS members at committees of the College

REFOCUS saw great developments with ever increasing engagement with College committees. Three members of the group, John Dixon, Julie Healy and Angela Dooley joined the External Affairs & Policy committee and Cianan Crummey joined the editorial board of the Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine (the College academic journal).

REFOCUS also worked closely with the Postgraduate Training Committee in 2015. John Kidney in collaboration with Dr Clodagh Power (trainee) worked on a series of articles for the Trainee e-newsletter Think Tank. This has proved to be a mutually beneficial relationship with Dr Power regularly attending a number of REFOCUS meetings also.

Towards the end of 2015, REFOCUS held a very promising meeting with Dean of Education, Prof Greg Swanwick, with a view to having increased involvement in the training of psychiatrists. The group looks forward to realising the items discussed in 2016.

CPsychI Walk and Talk with Psychiatrists which involved REFOCUS members



Kara Madden, Christina McCabe, Tony Blackmore, Anne Jeffers

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much"

Conclusion

2015 has been a very successful and productive year for REFOCUS. The group has continued to integrate with College membership as well as represent the College at external events and in the media. It is important to recognise the contribution of Andrea Ryder, Niamh Mongey and Micheál Clesham, key members of the College team who keep the group running as well as Director of Communications & Public Education Dr John Hillery for his continued support. Finally, we must also thank Dr Anne Jeffers for her commitment to REFOCUS since its inception. Without her tireless conviction, there would be no REFOCUS to report on.

REFOCUS Members

Dr Anne Jeffers (Joint - Chair)	George Bridges	Dr Clodagh Power
Liam Hennessy (Joint - Chair)	John Kidney	Andrea Ryder (External Affairs and Policy Manager)
Angela Dooley	Brian McNulty	Niamh Mongey (Communications Assistant)
Kara Madden	Eileen McCluskey	Micheál Clesham (Digital Communications Assistant)
Jeannine Webster	John Dixon	
Christine McCabe	Cianan Cobbe	
Julie Healy	Patricia O' Malley	
Kevin Jones	Brian Hartnett	
Louisa Corr	Cianan Crummey	
Tony Blackmore		



REFOCUS Meeting

Independent.ie Life Mind Yourself

Life Newsletter

#MindYourself: How to help a loved one battling depression or anxiety

What can we do for friends and family who are struggling to cope? Our reporter asked the experts

Christie Russell

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SHARE



Breathing space: Jeannine Webster and her son, James at their home in Donabate. Photo: Frank McGrath.

It's a difficult situation to be in, when you suspect a loved one might be finding life tough, or even battling depression or anxiety.

REFOCUS member, Jeannine Webster, featured in an article on Carers in the Irish Independent

REFOCUS Media Coverage

2015 saw a marked increase in the amount of media coverage for REFOCUS. As well as REFOCUS launching their inaugural report in July, Brian McNulty also published his own memoir 'Embracing Sanity'. Brian appeared on regional radio station Limerick Live95FM to discuss his journey and his work with REFOCUS. This was followed by further interviews, along with joint chair Dr Anne Jeffers on The Last Word with Matt Cooper on Today FM. Not limited to national radio, Brian and Anne also made an appearance on TV3's flagship morning show Ireland AM.

As part of World Mental Health Week, REFOCUS featured on RTE Radio 1's show, A Living Word. For 5 days of World Mental Health Week, the College of Psychiatrists produced short reflective pieces which were aired in the morning and at night. Both Jeannine Webster and joint chair Liam Hennessy recorded pieces for the series.

In November, Jeannine Webster was interviewed by the Irish Independent as part of a series titled #MindYourself. In an article titled "How to help a loved one battling depression or anxiety", Jeannine was photographed with her son James and spoke on her experience of supporting James through bouts of psychosis, depression and anxiety.

"My illness came as a total shock to my family. I hid it so well. I was one of those superconfident people – but I could be in a room balling my eyes out, and come out as if nothing was wrong."



RTE Radio 1's show, A Living Word