

Letter sent to the Editors of the Irish Times and The Examiner

18 January 2012

Sir, - The College of Psychiatry of Ireland wishes to express concern at the portrayal of mental illness and the mental health services on the Frontline programme on RTE on 16<sup>th</sup> January, and to correct some of the misinformation that was delivered.

Firstly clinical depression is a treatable disorder, which if left untreated can have fatal consequences. As for any serious illness, presentation at an A&E department will ensure the person has an immediate assessment by a specialist, in this case a psychiatrist. Monday night's programme gave the impression that in an emergency there was nowhere for people to turn. The programme also gave the impression that Clinical Depression was no different from mild sadness or distress brought on by adverse circumstances. There is a distinct difference. Throughout the programme the impression given was that antidepressants were bad for you, regardless of the problem. Antidepressants are effective and necessary treatments for those who suffer from Clinical Depression.

It is well accepted that best outcomes for any mental health problem will occur when a person can be treated as early as possible. Stigma of mental illness is the single greatest barrier to people seeking help. Last Monday's programme further stigmatised mental illness, encouraging people to stop antidepressants, and even our Minister for Mental Health referred to how they should only be used for short periods, rather than advising people follow the advice of their doctor.

It is true that our mental health services need reform. Since 2006 we have a strategy *A Vision for Change*, to bring about this reform. Central to this reform is having a Mental Health Directorate, which can ensure services are coordinated in such a way to ensure those with greatest need receive mental health services, and an acceptance of the need to have high quality mental health services, with effective collaboration with primary care.

The Minister referred to investing an extra €35m in mental health services. The College has requested an urgent meeting with both the minister and Dr. James Reilly, in order to ensure they are well informed on mental health, and that monies which are needed for severe mental illness are used appropriately. The College of Psychiatry has also contacted RTE to request that a more balanced programme on mental health issues can be broadcast.

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