

Developing NHS Services

Dr Trevor Powell

NHS services in Berkshire for people with autism spectrum conditions have developed steadily in recent years.

Children and young people are catered for by the CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) ASD Diagnostic Pathway. The service brings together a team of specialist paediatricians, psychologists, speech & language therapists and psychotherapists, who work with children up to the age of 18.

The Adult Autistic Spectrum Diagnostic Service, which has been in place since 2007, provides a diagnostic service for adults and works with patients and their GPs to help them understand the condition.



Dr Trevor Powell is a consultant clinical neuropsychologist working for Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, specialising in adult mental health and brain injury rehabilitation. He has played a leading role in developing an adult autism diagnostic service in Berkshire in recent years.

"I've always worked in mental health and neuropsychology, so a lot of my background has been working with people who had a brain injury, which is another group that 20 years ago fell between the cracks in terms of statutory services,

whether it be physical health, whether it be mental health.

"In my mind, adults with autism are similar in a sense to people who had an acquired brain injury. There hasn't been a formal service for that group.

"For people with a brain injury those services have developed over the past 20 years and I can see this happening for people with autism. So my interest is partly mental health, partly neuropsychology and partly having over the years seen adults who are definitely on the autistic spectrum.

"I remember having a meeting with the commissioner, probably about nine years ago, and he was saying 'oh yes, we send a number of people up to London, it costs us a fortune', and I remember saying to him, 'well, if you gave us the money, we could do two for the price of one'.

"It was a bit of a joke, but was actually quite accurate. So that's how the service started. It started as a very small service with just a trickle of referrals. But really over the last few years that trickle has become a stream and is now an absolute flood. We offer a six week post diagnostic course called "Being Me" which helps recently diagnosed people understand their condition better and meet other people in the same situation.

"People's reaction to getting a diagnosis – most people are generally relieved and will say 'well, this answers a lot of questions and gives me a framework for understanding why my life has been a struggle'.



"The major emotion is relief, sometimes people are a little bit angry that it hasn't been picked up earlier. For other people there's an element of relief, there's lots of other emotions, such as feeling a bit overwhelmed - 'What do I do now?' and other questions.

"Most people feel genuinely relieved and it's a positive experience. Some people say 'this has been a turning point in my life' or 'it's turned the lights on and now I understand things a bit better', so it's quite rewarding in that sense to sit down with someone for three hours, go through their life and then afterwards do the assessment and there's that feeling you know that you've done something quite useful.

"If someone gave us extra money, what we would like to do is develop the service, so that people get more of a follow-up. It would be good to have little more psychological therapy and to do more training and teaching - and training other people within the mental health trust."



Scan the QR code to view the video of Trevor Powell, or visit: <http://prt.cm/1d32aac>