

FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHTER FOR LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES

MAIREAD MITCHELL: FROM STUDENT NURSE TO LEARNING DISABILITY DIRECTOR



Roving Reporters Laura, Kerri-Anne, Philip, Gregory, and David, from Muckamore Abbey Hospital Patients Council interview Mairead Mitchell about her new role as Learning Disability Director in the Belfast Trust

Mairead Mitchell explains that she started as a student nurse in 1980 at the City Hospital, and became a qualified nurse in 1983. Mairead then trained as a midwife and began delivering babies at home, and then she became a health visitor, before moving into a management position of governance in 2004 in Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

Roving Reporter Philip asked Mairead what made her want to work with people with learning disabilities. She explained that as a midwife she had delivered a number of babies with learning disabilities, and she had been keen to follow their journeys into adulthood. She had worked with a Dr. Nevin, who completed a lot of research about people with learning disabilities, and this encouraged and inspired Mairead to improve the services provided to people with learning disabilities to help them have a better life.

Mairead has been on a long journey to get to her new position as Learning Disability Director in the Belfast Trust. She is now head of all learning disability services including Muckamore Abbey Hospital and the Children's Unit. She also looks after community services, social workers, nurses and psychologists that go out to people's homes, and care managers who are responsible for care packages for people in different sectors of the community. Mairead also manages all of the day centres and day opportunities. Mairead has a budget of £50 million, which is a lot of money to be responsible for. She explained that she could easily spend that amount, and she has to insure she spends it in the best way possible to provide the best services. A lot of the budget, she says, goes on staff wages.

Reporter Laura asked Mairead what her favourite part of the job is. Mairead said that she really enjoys getting out and about to meet people and find out what their aspiration for learning disability services is, and what they can do better. She said what is really good is the fantastic staff that she works with, who all want to work with people with learning disabilities and provide such excellent care: "We could not achieve the things we do without such committed and hard working staff". Mairead said she would like to congratulate them all on the work they have done with the people they support, to give everyone a chance to do what they want to do and have a fulfilled life.

Reporter David asked Mairead if there was anything she did not like about the job. She said she does not like spending time in meetings, although she recognises their importance, and she also hates having to say no to people because she has not got enough money left in her budget, especially when she can see how hard they have worked and thought about their projects. At the moment it is difficult with no Stormont and no Health Minister; she has had to guess that the budget is the same as last year. The paper released in October, The Bengoa Report focused on 'Delivering Care Together', including working with managers, patients and carers to bring services forward but it has stalled at the moment because of the collapse of Stormont.

Mairead explained how there are many changes happening, one example is from the legislation throughout the trusts regarding smoking, which has been affecting some of the patients. Other changes are that patients are moving to live in the community and wards are closing. "Though changes are hard in the long run they have been mostly positive, which is good. It is fantastic to see so many patients moving out into the community and having their own homes, which is part and parcel of insuring you have a good life. A hospital is not a place to live, it is a place to help you get well and then when you are better you go back into the community to live as independent a life as possible. It is really important we celebrate people going to live in their own homes."

Finally, Mairead said how important the Patients Council's work is, and that if things are not working well we can bring them to the attention of Esther, Barry or whoever we need so that they can attend the patients council meetings and discuss issues and solve any problems together. The most important thing is the patients and their journeys to getting well.

Mairead encouraged the council to invite her anytime they need to discuss issues with her, and she is always happy to help. She congratulated the patients on all the hard work they do.



WE HOPE YOU ALL ENJOY OUR ROVING REPORT AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH MAIREAD TO MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR PATIENTS AND LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES SO THAT WE CAN ALL LIVE A GOOD LIFE.