

Equality and Human Rights Commission: working in partnership with the Human Rights in Healthcare programme

What is the Human Rights in Healthcare programme?

The Human Rights Act is underpinned by the core values of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy for all. These values are at the heart of high quality health and social care and for the past five years, the Department of Health, British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) and four NHS Trusts have been working together to develop examples of how a human rights based approach can be put into practice in healthcare.

Mersey Care NHS Trust has been asked by the Department of Health to lead the next phase of the Human Rights in Healthcare programme. Its aims are to make human rights in healthcare real by:

- Establishing and maintaining a network of statutory and independent sector organisations that are interested in, or preferably passionate about, a human rights based approach to health and social care.
- Finding and sharing great examples of how a human rights based approach to health and social care has been put into practice.
- Arranging network events where people can come together and share best practice in human rights in health and social care.
- Supporting a small number of NHS Trusts, in partnership with BIHR, to develop a range of new, practical tools which enable a human rights based approach to different aspects of healthcare.
- Working with key stakeholders to try and develop a more strategic approach to human rights in healthcare.

It is led by Lindsey Dyer, Director, Service Users and Carers at Mersey Care NHS Trust. This year, the programme has been supporting three more NHS Trusts to develop and implement human rights-based approaches to:

- Commissioning health services
- Hydration and nutrition
- Evaluating services for older people

An evaluation of the learning from the latest round of projects will be launched at a national conference in November.

Working in partnership to embed human rights-based approaches

Earlier this year, the Commission featured Mersey Care NHS Trust's approach in its landmark Human Rights Review. In the filmed case study, Lindsey says, 'We've moved on over the last two years from being an organisation that takes a human rights based approach to involving service users and carers to becoming a human rights organisation, whereby human rights runs throughout the culture of the whole organisation'.

In recent months, the Commission has been working in partnership with Lindsey to promote practical approaches to human rights in health and social care through a series of roadshow events. These promoted the support available through the Human Rights in Healthcare and Dignity in Care initiatives and showcased a local good practice to demonstrate how human rights based approaches are improving services in both the health and social care sectors.

The events were attended by a range of stakeholders from the new Head of Human Rights at the Department of Health through to health service commissioners and managers at residential care homes.

They have given the Commission an opportunity to extend the reach of its Human Rights Review and amplified its messages about the treatment of vulnerable users of health and social care settings and the dignity and autonomy for older and disabled users of health and social care.

Provisional plans are in place for a further round of joint events to maintain the focus on public authorities' obligations to protect and promote human rights as the health and social care undergoes a period of significant change.