Learning disabilities and parenthood: Talks on April 14 and 28

Below you can read questions raised by members of the public at this talk on learning disabilities and parenthood.

**Question:** How many people are there in this area who are patients with learning disabilities?

**Response:** I do not have an exact figure here tonight however I do know the numbers have increased between 2008 and 2010.

**Question:** Are parents with learning disabilities more often a couple or single parent?

**Response:** We see all sorts of situations. Sometimes one half of the couple has a learning disability, sometimes both do and we do see single parents. Regardless of people’s circumstances we will work to support them in developing the skills to be a good parent.

**Question:** Do you ever find that the child has to be taken from the mother?

**Response:** Years ago children were automatically taken away from the mother. There is now a much greater understanding and respect for parents with learning disabilities and children are only taken when it’s essential for example because of child protection issues. A national strategy called *Valuing People Now* has helped to make sure that people with a learning disability are able to have the same rights as any other parent.

**Question:** Does working with lots of different agencies not worry and confuse patients with learning disabilities?

**Response:** Sometimes it can, but we aim to support people through each service they access, acting as a centre point to make sure they don’t get confused between services and referrals. We make sure they understand who they are meeting, what their rights are and what services are available to them.

**Question:** There is still discrimination against people with learning disabilities, how do they cope with getting jobs and finding housing?

**Response:** There is still a lack of awareness in some organisations of people with learning disabilities however there are increasing numbers of people who are getting into employment and being accepted into housing association housing. This is all being supported by some new guidance called *Valuing Employment Now* and the NHS is looking at ways to help employers to support people with learning disabilities.

**Question:** Are there a lot of people with learning disabilities and mental health problems?

**Response:** Yes, there are and there are people both with learning disabilities and mental health problems. GPs have recently been trained to have a higher awareness of the needs and conditions which are associated with a learning disability. Therefore they are not to ignore the fact a patient could also have a mental health problem as well as their learning disability.
**Question:** I have problems and I find if I ever have to make a complaint I am called a troublemaker. I find it difficult to make doctors’ understand.

**Response:** Thanks for sharing your experience. We want to help people with learning disabilities or mental health problems understand why doctors may not understand their needs. We have helped some patients self advocate and learn how to make sure that they receive the services they need.

**Question:** Why do you have to be 19 or over to be considered for the adult learning disabilities services including pregnancy and maternity services?

**Response:** It has been decided that this is the age where people can be referred over to adult learning services. There is some overlap as children’s services can care for those up to 18 or 25, depending on the individual, so the adult services need to start at 19 for those patients too old for children’s services.

**Question:** Do you use patients to deliver training to medical students, police and the other agencies you train for awareness?

**Response:** Not very often as it is up to the patient and how confident and comfortable they are about participating in training. We do sometimes manage to find willing patients to help deliver awareness training, but unfortunately not every time.

**Question:** When you have a review of your needs how many people can come to your personal meeting?

**Response:** As many as you like, it usually ranges from four to 10 including friends and family, GPs and nurses. We ask you who is important to you in relation to your health needs and do our best to make sure everyone is involved.

**Question:** Are there any support services, other than Mencap, who can support patients as not everyone likes the way Mencap help patients.

**Response:** LAMP is another agency you can look at when considering using other support agencies.