

# Putting the humanity back into healthcare

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An innovative study led by The University of Nottingham is to investigate whether arts and humanities can help improve the mental health and well-being of patients and carers alike.

The five-year project will examine the role that music, storytelling, photography, sculpture and other activities might play in assisting [mental health](#) service users and those who look after them.

The initiative builds on the work of Nottingham Health Humanities and its International Health Humanities Network and will centre on the concept of 'mutual recovery' – promoting social, cultural and emotional connectivity between patients, professionals and informal carers to gain mental health benefits for all parties involved in health, social or adult education delivery.

The study comes as part of a quiet revolution to challenge the overreliance of pharmaceutical and psychotherapy solutions which critics argue have not delivered the step-change needed to support mental health patients.

## Tremendous damage

Professor Paul Crawford, who is leading the research and holds the world's first chair in health humanities, said: "The target-driven, production line culture of our [healthcare system](#) has done tremendous damage and we are seeing management by remote control, where managers often don't have a clue what's happening as demonstrated by

the recent scandalous situation at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.

"This system is making it increasingly difficult for practitioners to be compassionate because they are under intense pressure to perform and many are suffering from [burnout](#) and struggling with their own mental health. When considering the attributes that modern-day healthcare is frequently accused of lacking, it is all too easy to overlook one of the most precious of all: humanity."

At present, studies suggest that [mental health problems](#) affect as many as one in three people and constitute the second-greatest health burden after cardiovascular disease.

Policy makers and professionals accept that mental health service users need help to recover but until now little attention has been paid to the possibility that the professionals who provide them with treatment and care might share this need. The same can be said of the six to seven million informal carers in the UK, many of whom receive little or no respite.

## **Shared creative process**

This innovative project, Creative Practice for Mutual Recovery, responds to an unprecedented opportunity to change the 'genetic code' of traditional approaches to mental health and wellbeing concerns through the [arts and humanities](#).

Funded by the Connected Communities programme, a cross-research funding council initiative led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the study will aim to advance new challenges to the current policy and funding focus on biomedical and psychosocial treatments.

Professor Crawford added: "This project is an intervention—our mental healthcare systems are not advancing and something is clearly missing. Our systems for aiding recovery in mental health service users is based on the concept that health professionals should offer a kind of 'distant' care from expert to service user without connecting with the social and cultural world of that person.

"With this project, we are seeking to show that in health, social care and adult education fields there are great opportunities to achieve a more shared creative process that will have emotional and mental health and well-being benefits not just for service users but also for informal carers and health, social care and education practitioners."

## **Mood enhancing**

Music and the arts have long-since been recognised for their mood enhancing properties and the study will examine whether by taking part in these activities together it can help to 'recover' the mental health of more than one community or constituency.

Among the initiatives that will be studied will be:

- **Birth Shock**—Using photography and filmmaking to enable mothers affected by post-natal depression and trauma and their partners to explore their birth stories and the experiences of obstetricians and midwives.
- **Making Music for Mental Health**—two 20-week programmes of creative music learning and performing for adult mental health service users and their carers led by professional and student musicians.
- **People Talking: Digital Dialogues for Mutual Recovery**—a digital storytelling programme with three groups of mental health users and health and social care professionals—two in Cornwall

and one in Wales.

- **Clay Works for Mutual Recovery**—investigating whether clay therapy can offer mutual recovery among adult [mental health service](#) users, carers, artists and health and [social care](#) personnel.
- A range of creative practices in the community adult education sector

The researchers will conduct interviews and analysis to establish whether all the parties have benefitted from the activities and they have enhanced the experience of connectedness and 'community'.

The study will involve collaboration between academics from Nottingham, Derby, De Montfort, Wolverhampton, Leicester and Falmouth universities, the Royal College of Music and various partners, not least Workers Education Association, Science Museum London, Mental Health Foundation and even National Institute of Health in the US.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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