

24 May, 2013

Taking care of young people with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems

Caring for children and adolescents with an intellectual disability can be very difficult – but when those children also have a behavioural or mental health problem, the challenges for individuals, families and carers can be far greater.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) clinicians will join disability professionals, teachers and school counsellors at St George Hospital on Friday 31 May, 2013, to discuss a range of topics and issues associated with caring for children and young people with an intellectual disability and a behavioural or mental health problem.

The forum is a joint initiative of SESLHD Mental Health Services, SESLHD Developmental Assessment Service, NSW Ageing, Disability and Homecare, NSW Education and Communities, University of NSW, Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, School Link and the Agency for Clinical Innovation and aims to provide important, practical information and promote care coordination.

According to Dr Murray Wright, psychiatrist and SESLHD Director of Mental Health, the forum will aim to promote better services for children and young people at school with an intellectual disability who also have behavioural or mental health problems.

"The forum will address the specialised needs of the population and will look at ways SESLHD Mental Health Services can work with other clinicians, schools, disability services and Non-Government Organisations to provide quality care.

"Due to the complex structure of different government departments, it is critical that professionals serving children and adolescents share information on how best they can work together to provide a seamless service," Dr Wright said.

"A significant percentage of children and adolescents with an intellectual disability have co-existing mental health disorders.

"The rate of clinical mental health problems in children and adolescents with an intellectual disability is at least 30 to 40 per cent, or 2.5 times the rate for children and adolescents without an intellectual disability" he said.

Dr Wright said it is important that agencies work together to provide continuum of care to those with complex needs, and to achieve the best possible outcomes for individuals, their families and support teams.

"This is an exciting opportunity for professionals to come together and talk about the way we care for young people with behavioural or mental health problems and intellectual disabilities and how we can best provide appropriate mental health services into the future," Dr Wright said.

The forum will hear from a number of professionals who will talk on topics such as, *Neurobiology of Challenging Behaviour; Pathways from School to Prison, Communication, Sensory Processing and Parenting Education*. Clinicians will also take part in a panel discussion entitled, *'What are we still trying to figure out?'*

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

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