The South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust’s (SLaM) Child and Adolescent Eating Disorders Service has recently launched an innovative intensive treatment programme (ITP) for adolescents with anorexia nervosa. It is open to young people diagnosed with anorexia nervosa or non-specified eating disorders, aged 11–18 years, from anywhere across the UK.

Committed to recovery

The ITP consists of intensive small group therapy and support at meal times five days a week. Education is provided by teachers who support each young person’s current educational needs. The ITP is coordinated by Eoin Power, a mental health nurse and family therapist with over 10 years experience in both inpatient and outpatient adolescent eating disorders treatment.

Mr Power said the ITP team was committed to each individual adolescent’s recovery.

‘As a team, we are confident that committed participation in the programme offers young people and their families real hope of overcoming their illness and beginning recovery,’ Mr Power said.

‘It is the only programme of its kind in either the UK or Europe for young people with anorexia or other eating disorders. Our unique programme enables young people to attend the clinic each weekday and then go home to their families each night.’

The clinical team comprises consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr Mima Simic, three psychology assistants, three mental health nurses, one psychologist, and Mr Power. In addition the programme has a part-time dietician, part-time senior psychologist and part-time consultant paediatrician.

The intensive treatment programme

The ITP is a seven-week programme for a small group of up to eight young people. The programme runs from 8 am to 8 pm, Monday to Friday for a period of six weeks followed by or proceeded by multi-family therapy (MFT). The programme is designed to be not only to be therapeutic but also fun and creative, and includes a range of activities. The programme aims to provide young people with skills that they can apply in everyday life. The groups include:

- Groups for anxiety, perfectionism and self-esteem, using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) approaches
- Flexible thinking groups using cognitive remediation therapy (CRT) approaches
- Managing emotions, relationships and distress using dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) approaches
- Psychoeducation and physical health sessions
- Relaxation, yoga, art and other creative groups such as drama and drumming
- Food group and individual dietetic support
- Individual paediatric support for monitoring physical health and physical risk issues.

Each young person and their family have two allocated professionals who act as the main point of contact for the duration of their time in the ITP. The ITP offers seamless service between the outpatient treatment team, through close planning and liaison and post-ITP support.

Unlike inpatient care, the programme

Laura Crowden outlines the recently-launched intensive treatment programme at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) for adolescents with eating disorders
allows young people to spend evenings and weekends with their families in order to put into practice the skills they have learnt during the week. Weekends are planned on Friday afternoons with families in attendance, followed by weekend reviews on Monday mornings—family groups are also held each Wednesday evening. These groups are for parents and the young people and even siblings can be involved if appropriate.

Jo Fletcher, Deputy Director CAMHS, said most treatments for children and adolescents suffering anorexia involve long hospital stays, averaging between six months and a year.

‘Unfortunately, dedicated specialist services for young people with anorexia are limited across the United Kingdom. At the Maudsley, we are at the forefront of developing family-based treatments for children and young people.’

Most specialist eating disorder services for children and adolescents in the UK tend to be private sector and are generally full-time, residential, inpatient care. 35% of child and adolescent eating disorder cases in the UK are treated in hospital. Residential treatment also has a high risk or relapse of 25–30% after the first admission, and 60–70% for subsequent admissions.

In contrast, 90–95% of the children and adolescents treated for eating disorders at SLaM are managed on an outpatient (or combined outpatient and day patient) basis. The proportion of young people requiring hospitalisation for eating disorders at SLaM is around 20% of the national average.

Mr Power said the new programme was ‘aimed primarily at those remaining 20% of young people who are likely to end up in hospital as well as those young people who are considered ‘stuck’ or are deteriorating in their outpatient treatment. Through this new intensive approach, we hope to work closely with young people and their family to keep them on a path to recovery and keep them out of hospital.’

**Treatment outcomes**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) (2004) recommends that whenever possible, adolescent patients should be treated for anorexia on an outpatient basis by a service that has expertise in both the psychological aspects of the treatment and in assessing the physical risk associated with eating disorders. NICE also emphasises the importance of family interventions, and age-appropriate facilities for children and adolescents including educational activities.

Mr Power says SLaM’s Child and Adolescent Eating Disorder Service is achieving both high user satisfaction and very low drop-out rates. ‘At the end of 9–12 months of treatment, 65–85% of our young people will have significantly improved, having achieved a healthy weight and being able to function normally,’ he said.

‘At follow-up, both at two and four years, most people will have made a complete recovery with no more than 5–10% relapsing.’

SLaM’s Child and Adolescent Eating Disorder Service is renowned nationally and internationally for its clinical and research evaluation of psychological treatments for eating disorders in young people. Having specialist knowledge of eating disorders, with expertise in both individual and family therapy, the service helps patients and their families explore the nature of eating disorder and the impact it is having on the young person and their family.

Mr Power said the service has been developed through many years of research and clinical experience. ‘SLaM’s research is internationally recognised. The ‘Maudsley model’, also known as ‘family-based treatment’ or the ‘Maudsley approach’, was pioneered at SLaM in the mid 1980s to treat anorexia nervosa in adolescents,’ he said.

The Maudsley approach is an intensive outpatient treatment method where parents play an active and positive role. Instead of blaming the family situation for contributing to the development of eating disorders, it uses parents as an essential resource in treating anorexia.

SLaM’s CAMHS eating disorder treatment includes the multi-family therapy (MFT), which was awarded the Positive Practice Award from the National Institute for Mental Health in England, in 2004.

The MFT programme involves an initial intensive four-day multi-family workshop, with further follow-up group meetings over nine months. It is currently being evaluated in a large multi-centre treatment trial funded by the Health Foundation. Feedback from families has been very positive, with many emphasising the collaborative nature of the treatment. The new ITP is located in SLaM’s Michael Rutter Centre for Children and Young People, and complements SLaM’s other outpatient and inpatient national specialist services for children and adolescents.

**References**


Further information

SLaM provides national and specialist mental health services to children and adolescents across the UK. SLaM’s child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) include a range of outpatient clinics and four inpatient units, located at the Maudsley Hospital in Camberwell, and the Bethlem Royal Hospital in Beckenham.

SLaM’s CAMHS services are renowned both in the UK and internationally, with clinical practice that thrives on links with the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) and the Medical Research Council Child Psychiatry Unit. For more information on SLaM’s CAMHS Eating Disorder Services visit: www.national.slam.nhs.uk/camhs-eatingdisorders

**Above: ITP coordinator Eoin Power**